

# **Barriers and Enablers for Teachers Assessing Listening and Speaking Skills at Secondary level in Bangladesh**

Master of Education Thesis

By

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# **Barriers and Enablers for Teachers Assessing Listening and Speaking Skills at Secondary Level in Bangladesh**

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### **List of Acronyms**

CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CD	Compact Disk
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EfT	English for Today
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
TG	Teachers' Guide



### **Abstract**

Research indicates that assessment systems dictate classroom practices, although assessment systems do not always have a positive impact on classroom behaviours. The focus of the present study was to explore Bangladesh secondary English teachers' understandings about listening and speaking skills assessment as well as to learn the barriers and enablers they encounter in assessing those two skills. The study showed that the Bangladesh secondary English curriculum does not include the assessment of listening and speaking skills, although the curriculum document gives a mandate to teachers to practise and assess all the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The study also indicated that teachers taught English mixing with Bangla language; they had not been trained to assess listening and speaking skills; the English curriculum required restructuring to make way for listening and speaking skills assessment; teachers needed listening and speaking resources to enable them to undertake both listening and speaking practices and assessment; and above all, it shows that the teachers need instruction from the education authority in order to start aural-oral skills assessment in schools. This qualitative study with six Bangladeshi secondary school English teachers employed classroom observations and semi-structured interviews.

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **1.1 Prelude**

The English language enjoys high status in Bangladesh education. It is taught as a compulsory foreign language from class one to twelve. The first Education Commission of Bangladesh, which is popularly known as the Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission, spelt out the importance and place of English language in the curriculum in the commission report in 1974. The commission recommended that although the medium of instruction at all levels would be Bangla, English should be taught as a compulsory foreign language at primary and secondary levels, as it was before independence in 1971 (Ministry of Education [MoE], 1974). In addition to the compulsory English classes in primary and secondary levels, the National University of Bangladesh has also made a 100-mark paper in English compulsory for all students studying at undergraduate level since 1995. However, English education in Bangladesh has not always enjoyed equal importance over the last four decades.

Since the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, English continued to be in regular use despite a national policy favouring Bangla. The Language Introduction Act of 1987 put emphasis on the use of Bangla for record keeping, laws, legal actions, and proceedings; as well as in government offices, courts, official and semi-official correspondences, except in the case of foreign relations, and autonomous institutions affecting the use of English in those domains (Banu & Sussex, 2001; Ministry of Establishment, 1987). According to Banu and Sussex (2001), language policy documents and government memoranda concerning the use of Bangla in the offices and courts indicated the weak status of English in Bangladesh at that time. Hoque (2008) reports that the Quodrat-e-Khuda education commission exempted students from classes one to five from learning English in 1974 but the 1976 National Curriculum Committee made English compulsory from class three. The Bengali Language Introduction

Act, 1987, attached so much importance to Bangla that it warned the government officials that “if anyone puts forward an appeal at any of the institutions mentioned, in any other language than Bengali, it will be considered as illegal” (Ministry of Establishment, 1987). Bangla was declared one of the state languages of Pakistan in 1956 and after the independence in 1971, Bangla still enjoys the status of the state language of Bangladesh. Following government directives to use Bangla in every field of official communication, the teachers’ as well as students’ level of motivation to use English declined, which resulted in low quality of English in the country.

Moreover, the Bangladeshi people have a strong sentiment for Bangla, having sacrificed many lives in 1952 in order to retain the right to speak Bangla. However, most Bangladeshi people also regard English as equally important for personal, national, and international reasons. English teachers in Bangladesh enjoy a high social status, and competence in English helps Bangladeshi people get good jobs more easily at home and abroad.

Although English has been taught compulsorily in schools in Bangladesh for a period of ten years, most Bangladeshi students cannot communicate well orally in real life situations. In fact, Imam (2005) reports that the average English language skill level of university students is equivalent to that which is set by the government for the students of class seven. In order to address the low levels of oral communication proficiency, the government of Bangladesh introduced Communicative English to class six in 1996; and then to higher classes at the secondary level on an incremental basis. Textbooks called *English for Today* (EFT) are currently used from class six to ten, and textbooks of the same title are also taught at primary and higher secondary levels. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has prepared teachers’ guides (TG) for those texts to enable teachers to implement the textbooks properly. However, Hamid and Baldauf (2008) report that, despite the theoretical shift from a traditional to a more communicative mode of teaching and learning English in Bangladesh,

the physical facilities and the teaching-learning approaches actually employed have remained much the same over the past decade.

Teachers working at the secondary level of the education system in Bangladesh have been trained in English through projects such as the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP), Female Secondary School Assistance Project (FSSAP), Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project (SESIP), Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP), and through programmes implemented by some other non-government organisations such as the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). However, despite these training programmes and the priority given to communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches in the curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996), my experience shows that many teachers in Bangladesh continue to teach using the grammar translation (GT) method. This may not be surprising as Cook (2001) reports that, despite the introduction of CLT in many countries, teachers very often continue to practise the traditional methods of teaching English. These traditional approaches to English language teaching place an emphasis on linguistic competence rather than the oral communication competence. As a result, most Bangladeshi students usually pass the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations with good grades in English, although these grades are awarded on the basis of only reading and writing skills assessment. Hamid and Baldauf (2008) comment that, as these examinations test only linguistic competence, students' grades are not reflected in their real-life English use beyond the classroom.

The curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996) recommended that the Bangladesh secondary English teachers assessed all four macro language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), but my understanding, gathered through interactions with English teachers in training sessions, is that most teachers do not assess the listening and speaking skills of their students; rather they assess only reading and writing skills. According to

Podder (2010), students engaged in the new communicative curriculum are expected to be more active than teachers, doing a variety of language activities including pair work, group work, presentation, debate, role play, dramatisation, and so on. Through this they are expected to learn to speak and understand when others speak English in a communicative English language classroom. Teachers using this communicative approach are supposed to assess students' listening and speaking skills. Although English teachers in Bangladesh assess the reading and the writing skills of their students, the other two skills are avoided by most teachers probably on the pretext that these skills are not tested in the SSC examinations. I believe it is timely to learn more about Bangladesh secondary English teachers' understandings about listening and speaking skills assessment, what they think are the barriers and enablers, if any, in assessing aural-oral skills, and above all what they think about the impact of the assessment system on students' learning of language skills. This research aims to explore these issues.

## **1.2 Research questions**

Qualitative research focuses on the subjects' world, exploring their beliefs and ways of understanding their own worlds. The present study intends to address the following major research questions: How do Bangladeshi secondary English teachers make sense of listening and speaking skills assessment? What are the barriers and enablers for them in assessing these two skills? The study also explores what the teachers' positions are regarding listening and speaking skills assessment and aims to investigate what might assist them to be able to start assessing aural-oral skills. The study employs classroom observation and semi-structured interview in order to better comprehend teachers' understandings of the issues surrounding listening and speaking skills assessment, and the barriers and enablers they experience.

The Bangladesh curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996) describes assessment in education as an important way to measure students' progress and evaluate their achievement, and as a device for checking students' understanding. As an English language teacher educator and as a former English language teacher at the secondary level in Bangladesh, I have observed that assessment, and especially listening and speaking skills assessment, receives little attention in practice, despite continuous assessment throughout the academic year having been declared central to any proper evaluation system in the curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996). This curriculum report further suggests that there should be continuous assessment throughout the months instead of monthly tests, and teachers are advised to be careful to assess all the four skills of the English language.

Although many educationists promote formative assessment (assessment done during teaching in the classroom) as a way of finding learners' weaknesses with a view to addressing them (NZCER, 2006), continuous formative assessment throughout the year is frequently not practised in the education system in Bangladesh. Students at secondary level sit two examinations (first terminal and second terminal) every year usually in the fourth and the seventh months, and one year final examination in or at the end of the eleventh month of the academic year respectively. School authorities check students' reading and writing skills by means of these internal examinations whereas listening and speaking skills are usually avoided.

After five years of study at secondary schools, students in Bangladesh sit for the SSC examinations and most students pass two 100-mark English papers, but their skills in real life oral-aural communication in English are not satisfactory (Podder, 2010). Concerned English language educationists reiterated in the curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996) that "until and unless a public examination is devised that tests English skills rather than students' ability to memorise and copy without understanding, the aims and objectives of the curriculum and syllabus can never be successfully realised" (p. 152). However, the current

assessment practice does not fulfil the curriculum expectations, although some linguists believe that assessment in language teaching plays an important role in changing the classroom practices (Wall & Alderson, 1993).

It is anticipated that the findings of this study may contribute to positive changes in the English language teaching-learning situation in the secondary schools in Bangladesh in general, and listening and speaking skills assessment in particular. I also hope, I will be able to deal with the secondary English teachers more skillfully and confidently as an English language teacher educator as a result of this research investigation. Besides, the study has helped me widen my horizons of knowledge making me more confident and competent in my profession. I also hope to undertake more research projects related to my profession, the benefits of which would directly go to the secondary English teachers as well as to the whole nation through potential improvements to teaching quality in the future. In addition, policy makers and practising English teachers in Bangladesh and in other countries where CLT is practised may find the suggestions how listening and speaking skills assessment could be incorporated and practised at the secondary level usefully.

### **1.3 Summary**

Although English is considered important for national and international reasons in Bangladesh, the number of oral English users is not increasing and English teaching and learning has continued to focus on reading and writing. The current English language assessment practices and the Bangladeshi secondary students' poor performance in oral communication motivated this current investigation of the understandings of the dynamics of listening and speaking skills assessment of secondary school English teachers in Bangladesh. It is anticipated that the findings of the study may contribute to reforms of the current secondary English language curriculum, with increased emphasis on aural-oral practice and assessment alongside the other two major skills of English language.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

It is an intellectual culture to study the related literature before starting a research project in order to consolidate the knowledge on and around the field as well as to find research gaps in the respective area. I, too, reviewed available literature related to the second language learning theories, English listening and speaking skills assessment as well as literature about the washback effects of tests and examinations on the classroom practices, in order to gain a wider understanding of the problem as well as of the research field.

### 2.2. Review

Ellis (2005) suggests that there are three major general approaches to the teaching of a second or a foreign language which cover almost all the second language learning theories. The three approaches include the oral-situational approach, the notional-functional approach, and the task-based approach; and these approaches, Ellis (2005) claims, reflect the current practices of language pedagogy. According to Ellis (2005) some other second or foreign language learning theories such as content-based language teaching, lexical approach and so on are not usually used widely in school-based language teaching. Ellis (2005) further says that a oral-situational approach is based on behaviourist language learning theory where learners have to form a language use habit through repeated practice and where grammar is learned implicitly through the repeated use of the language.

Ellis (2005) also argues that the notional-functional approach draws on theories and descriptions of language that emphasize the functional and social aspects of language competences such as apologizing and requesting; and notions such as past time and possibility. Notional-functional approach was based on the theory of communicative competence (Hymes, 1971, cited in Ellis, 2005).



The learning principle underlying a task-based approach is that learners learn a language best if they engage in activities that have interactional authenticity (Bachman, 1990, cited in Ellis, 2005). That is, students have to practise the target language in a natural way as they have to use it outside the classroom. This approach gives priority to fluency over accuracy and learners are expected to learn grammar through communication and it is desired that language should be taught in context. This approach focuses both on ‘form’ and ‘meaning’ of the language. The Bangladesh secondary English curriculum, too, attaches importance to both the linguistic as well as communicative competence of the target language.

Whatever second language learning theories are used to inform an approach, assessment plays a vital role in supporting learning and measuring students’ progress as well as informing the adjustment and development of teaching strategies (Black & William, 2003). In order to define assessment, it may be useful to start with tests. A test is a “method of measuring a person’s ability, knowledge, or performance in a given domain” (Brown, 2004, p. 3). That is, states Brown, a test is a method or a set of techniques, procedures, and items which a test-taker needs to perform as per the expectations of the test planners and administrators. On the basis of their performances, the test-takers’ ability and knowledge in a particular domain is measured. Brown comments that assessment is a continuous process which encompasses tests, students’ responses and comments in and outside the classroom, written works, and so on. Teachers usually keep on assessing students’ performances in an informal way as lessons proceed. Tests are, therefore, a sub-set of assessment. There are many procedures and tasks that teachers use in order to assess students’ achievements. According to Brown (2004), an effective teacher assesses students, both incidentally and intentionally in-and-outside the classrooms.

When assessment is intended to give feedback to learners during a course, it is called assessment for learning or formative assessment. Assessment for learning can include

‘familiarising learners with the learning outcomes’, ‘supporting learners to carry out self-evaluations in terms of the set objectives’, ‘providing formal or informal feedback, and supporting learners to set their own learning goals’ (NZCER, 2006, p. 3). Studies show that innovative formative assessment produces significant learning gains for students (Black & William, 2001).

When the assessment is used at the end of a term or a semester or a year to measure students’ learning, it is called assessment of learning or summative assessment. In other words, continual recording of achievements when added to determine the learners’ final grades is also summative assessment. The ultimate goal of assessment is to benefit learners through feedback (NZCER, 2006; Nunan, 1988), although there are some other reasons for assessment, for instance, to report on learners’ progress; to improve teaching-learning approaches and techniques; to promote life-long learning; and for entry to universities (NZCER, 2006).

The United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand had a sharp shift from traditional to competency-based assessment systems in the area of language education around 2006. Here competencies refer to learning outcomes in terms of behaviour. Competencies are the combination of attributes which underlie successful performances. Brindley (1995) asserts that assessment in a competency-based system is concerned with present performance as well as with what other performances are possible to be carried out by a learner. He further adds that the ability of language learners to generalise one language task to other similar kinds of tasks and contexts are also considered during assessment. According to Brindley, sample tasks for assessment should, therefore, be selected from a range of tasks and contexts so that learners can easily cope with a new situation.

Despite some issues with competency-based assessment such as valid assessment tools and the procedures of using those tools, reports on the implementation of this approach indicate a number of positive outcomes. Brindley (1995) provides some examples such as teachers and students being more focused on language as a tool of communication; assessment being integrated in the learning process; students' getting better feedback as the learning outcomes are pre-set; and better communication between the assessors and the assessed. Brown and Hudson (1998) state that obstacles in competency-based assessment can be reduced through practising assessment procedures as well as training teachers continuously.

Brown and Hudson (1998) also mention a number of alternative assessment systems which are being used by different language educators. These include classroom observation by teachers, student-portfolios, self-assessment and peer-assessment. Brown and Hudson also outline some positive characteristics for alternative assessment which they think would be useful to most language teachers and testers. These include students' need to perform, create, produce, or do something; use of real-world contexts or simulations; assessment based on the activities practised in the classrooms; focus on processes as well as products; strengths and weaknesses covered in the form of feedback; culturally responsive tests; student awareness of the rating criteria; and items that usually instigate teachers to think about their future teaching and assessment roles.

Brindley (1990) reports a study carried out on sixty respondents in an Adult Migrant Education Centre in Sydney which found that self assessment and teacher assessment scores were consistent. The respondents were asked to do self assessment of their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills using a seven points rating scale, but in peer assessment they were asked to rate only speaking. Although the study showed that in many cases self assessment and teacher assessment were consistent, the peer assessment scores were higher than the teachers' rating. This indicates that these alternative assessment systems may be

useful in secondary English education in Bangladesh. Butler and Lee (2010) report on the use of a wide range of self assessment techniques in a variety of situations where most of the respondents were sixth grade students in South Korea. The rating scales covered the expected general and specific competencies. Although the assessors' experiences, skills, and objectivity can be questioned, research shows that the teachers as well as students improved their skills in using the self assessment tools. The analysis of the assessment results are found reliable irrespective of the raters' being experienced and inexperienced, trained and untrained, and native and non-native.

Nunan (1988) maintains that, as language teaching and learning is skill-based, language proficiency must be determined in terms of behaviour. According to Nunan, proficiency in this context refers to students' ability to perform certain communicative tasks with a certain degree of skill; skill in grammar, tenses, vocabulary, socio-cultural contexts, phonology, and so on. Nunan argues that students have to be skilled in reacting appropriately in different and changing situations.

Nunan (1988) adds that the aims and objectives of a language course are previously determined and that is why those aims and objectives must be reflected in teaching as well as in the assessment procedures. He asserts that tests should be directly related to what has been taught or practised in the classrooms (unless they are for diagnostic purposes), and that classroom practices must be consistent with the aims of the curriculum, and desire of the curriculum planners as well as the government. Accordingly, says Nunan, if learners or a section of learners, cannot achieve the goals and objectives set for a course, it becomes urgent to check the cause of the failure. Nunan holds that it is the teachers' and the curriculum designers' responsibility to decide how they will assess the learners' language skills. Thus, the appropriateness of content, selection of teaching methods and techniques, students' practice of the skills inside and outside schools, importance of students' total immersion in

skill practices, and students' opportunities to assess themselves and teaching-learning processes and materials all need to be considered during planning and administering assessment activities.

Brown and Hudson (1998) point out that teachers need to understand that language assessment practices are fundamentally different from those in most other disciplines because of the types of tests language teachers can and do use. Teachers also need to be aware of which tests measure what skills. Brown and Hudson emphasised that selected-response assessment which includes true-false, matching, gap-filling, and multiple-choice questions are good for testing listening and reading skills. However, for assessing students' productive skills such as writing and speaking, Brown and Hudson claim that constructed-response assessment is better. This includes requiring students to fill in gaps, write or tell short answers, and perform in terms of speaking and writing. They further add that teachers also use personal-response assessment in order to measure students' productive skills. In this sort of assessment, teachers involve students in activities such as talking individually with them on a particular topic, maintaining a portfolio, and assessing themselves and others. In performance assessment, according to Brown and Hudson, examinees need to perform some task which must be as authentic as possible, and the performances are judged by qualified raters.

Brown (2004) states that teachers and others concerned with assessment should be aware of factors like practicality, reliability, validity, authenticity, and the washback effects of tests before, during, and after administering tests to judge students' skills and knowledge. He says that an effective test of English is cheap, time-bound, easily-administered, and has an evaluation procedure which is specific and time-efficient. According to him, a test devoid of practicability consumes too much time of test-takers, test-administrators, and test-evaluators. A reliable test is consistently dependable and this sort of a test gives similar results if

administered on same or similar groups of students even on different occasions, he claims. Brown (2004) also asserts that the reliability issue is associated with students, raters, test administration and administrators, and the test itself. Students' physical and mental illness, fatigue, fear, and anxieties lessen the student-related reliability of assessment.

Munoz and Alvarez (2010) state that intra and inter-rater unreliability occurs when two or more raters give inconsistent scores because of unspecific rating criteria, bias, subjectivity, fatigue, carelessness, and pre-assumption about students as 'good' or 'bad'. They reiterate that it is difficult to achieve rater reliability but a range of assessment tasks instead of a single-type task benefit language learners and brings increased reliability of the assessment process. Test-administration-related reliability also depends on the environment of the test-room, seats and sitting-arrangements, temperature, light, and sometimes on the movements of the invigilators. Brown (2004) adds that test reliability may be hampered due to the extended length of a test where test-takers can get tired and answer the later questions poorly. Moreover, timed tests discriminate against the students who feel pressured, resulting in poor performance within time limits.

Brown (2004) states that assessment systems often determine the teaching and learning culture of a classroom. This determination of the classroom practices on the basis of assessment is referred to as a washback effect. Washback also includes the feedback given to students as strengths, weaknesses, and indications of ways to develop certain areas. Brown adds that formal tests, whether they are formative or summative, should ideally have positive washback, but sometimes they do not have any. Additionally, he claims that if the students are graded with letters or marks only and there are no specific comments on the strengths and weaknesses, the results do not actually benefit the students so far as the language development is concerned.

Wu and Fang (2002) state that the washback effect of examinations is a constraint in the implementation of CLT in a context where English is taught as a foreign language and where the main purpose of learning English is passing national examinations which usually test the learners' knowledge of grammar and reading comprehension. Kim (2003) reports that other barriers in assessing listening and speaking skills include teachers' lack of communicative competence, large classes, and lack of appropriate testing tools. Wu and Fang (2002) further state that, cultural and contextual constraints can originate from English teachers' lack of understanding of CLT approaches.

When teachers themselves are lacking in English language skills, it becomes difficult for them to assess students' language skills. Moreover, assessing listening is complicated, as the product of listening is not observable and preservable for rechecking. Waugh and Joliffe (2008) claim that speaking assessment is troublesome because only a few minutes' speaking evidence is not enough to judge a learner. According to them, the objectives of a listening and speaking lesson should be told to learners beforehand and there should be an agreed set of criteria for assessment. They claim that in order to do that in a better way, activities should be set specifically to teach listening and speaking and criteria for success shared at the start; activities should include pair and group work; and even a little achievement of students should be recognised.

Cheng and Curtis (2004) state that tests or examinations are powerful tools having the power to change the educational system even without changing other educational components such as teacher training, curriculum, and so on. Tests and examinations have the potential to change classroom practices although the authors suggest that these tests should be introduced during the teaching learning processes first instead of using them directly in the high-stakes examinations. They also add that materials which match the new tests should be used in the teaching-learning processes. However, concerned educators as well the education

administrators need to be aware of factors some such as validity, reliability, and authenticity of the tests during their construction and administration. Those factors are discussed below.

Validity is “the extent to which inferences made from assessment results are appropriate, meaningful, and useful in terms of the purpose of assessment” (Gronlund, 1998, cited in Brown, 2004, p. 22). Other kinds of validity he mentions, are content validity, criterion-related validity, construct validity, sequential validity, and face validity. Brown (2004) asserts that if a test contains subject-matter on the basis of which conclusions are to be made, and if a test requires the test-takers to perform in terms of behaviour, it can be said that the test has got content validity. For example, if a teacher wants to test the speaking skill of a learner and gives a test to write an essay or a paragraph, it does not have any content validity; or if a teacher gives a situation which students are not likely to encounter throughout their life; or if the objectives of the course are not reflected, the test has no content validity. Concurrent validity is ‘being able to perform effectively beyond the tests in actual situations’ (Brown, 2004, p. 24) which helps to establish the validity of the test or the test results. Predictive validity is related to placement and admission tests.

Construct validity is related to theories, hypotheses, or models that attempt to explain observed phenomena in our universe of perceptions (Brown, 2004). Proficiency and communicative competence are linguistic constructs which may or may not be measured directly or empirically (Brown, 2004). Construct validity is a major issue as it is not possible to cover all the skills and sub-skills in a single test. Consequential validity is what the consequence or effect of a test is on the society in general and on the students in particular. For instance, argues Brown (2004), if students think that they need to be coached privately for doing better in the tests, all guardians would not be able to afford the extra expenditure. An important aspect of consequential validity is the extent to which “students view the



assessment as fair, relevant, and useful in learning” (Gronlund, 1998, cited in Brown, 2004, p. 26). Face validity, on the other hand, refers to how good the test seems to be to test the knowledge and skills of students in the view of the test-takers, administrators, and other stakeholders (Mousavi, 2002, cited in Brown, 2004). Though validity is a complex concept and all kinds of validity are interwoven, classroom teachers should have some understanding of them to be able to construct good tests and to administer them properly in order to achieve stronger validity.

Reliability, as earlier stated, is concerned with the extent to which one can depend on the test results. If a test gives consistent results, it is considered that the test is reliable (Brown, 2004; Clark, 1999). Authenticity in language testing refers to the extent to which the task in the test resembles the real situations. Brown (2004) claims that for a test to be authentic, it should have natural language, contextualised items which are relevant and interesting to students, thematically organised items, and tasks that approximate real-world-tasks.

It was earlier stated that English used to enjoy the status of a second language during the Pakistan period, when there was a need for a common second language for communication between the people of the Bangla-speaking East Pakistan and the Urdu-speaking West Pakistan. Podder (2010) reports that after independence of Bangladesh in 1971, there was a lack of interest among teachers and students in teaching and learning English, although English language was taught compulsorily from class six to ten. Now English is being taught as a compulsory subject from class one to twelve in Bangladesh. However, the situation with regard to interest in teaching and learning English for oral communication remains much the same.

Little has been written to date in regard to assessment in English language education in the Bangladesh context. As my current project is a qualitative study, I wanted to review more

qualitative studies in this area, but very few qualitative research articles directly related to the proposed field of study are available, although there are many quantitative research articles in the field of assessment in English language education. Amongst the studies, a number of them are directly related to Asian situations.

A study in Taiwan reports that, despite the Ministry of Education's endeavour to promote CLT, the existing assessment system encouraged students' rote learning instead of practice of communicative language skills. Chung (2009) conducted a qualitative study in order to explore students' perspectives of CLT in Taiwan senior high schools where English was taught as a foreign language. The finding of this research, conducted with 24 students aged between 16 and 17, was that the students possessed very positive attitudes towards acquiring English language competencies. The researcher suggested a slight change in the classroom practices in order to satisfy the communication needs of the students and the demand of the Education Ministry, and thus to achieve a long-term goal of language teaching and learning.

A mixed-method study in India surveyed on 31 secondary English teachers, and interviewed and observed six of them (Christ & Makarani, 2009). The study reports that there were inconsistencies between the teachers' theoretical conceptions of CLT and their implementation of it in the classrooms. The exams did not test aural-oral skills, and teachers and students were not eager to practise listening and speaking as "all students are exam oriented. They want to pass the exam with flying colors, get the job. They don't care how much they can express themselves in English" (Christ & Makarani, 2009, p. 84).

Liu, Ahn, Baek, and Han (2004) report that the South Korean government wanted the teachers to maximise English speaking in teaching but the learners did not improve much in terms of English language achievement. The researchers interviewed as well as video-recorded 13 secondary English teachers' teaching in South Korea in order to see why the

English language teaching and learning was not improving and report that teachers used only 32% English when talking in their classes, although both teachers and students considered more than 50% English by teachers in English classes was reasonable.

Khamkhien (2010) reports that the Thai students could not master the four basic language skills, especially listening and speaking, although the Thai government wanted to improve the students' listening and speaking skills in order to be able to keep pace with globalisation. Khamkhien analysed speaking tests, observed English teaching, and assessed speaking in the Thai context, and reports that one of the most important reasons for students' low achievement was that the teachers spoke Thai language in English classes. Other reasons included teachers' being unable to interact with students in genuine English, lack of proper curricula, a greater focus on the grammatical details, inappropriate texts, and the testing and evaluation systems.

Li (1998) reports that in a case study conducted with 18 South Korean school teachers studying a teacher education program in a Canadian university, the English teachers' perceived difficulties in adopting CLT were rooted in the differences between underlying educational theories of South Korea and those of western countries. Li suggests that EFL countries like South Korea needed to change their fundamental approach to education and that implementation should be gradual and grounded in the countries' own EFL situations.

A qualitative study by Troudi, Coombe, and Al-Hamly (2009) in another EFL contexts which have similarities to Bangladesh explored tertiary teachers' roles and views regarding English language assessment in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. An open-ended questionnaire was sent to 21 tertiary teachers teaching in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates. The main finding of this research was that there was a wider gap between the teachers' philosophy of assessment and their actual practices. Another important finding was that the teacher

participants did not have any voice regarding assessment-criteria setting, and preparing the assessment tools and curriculum.

Tsui (2003) conducted case studies on four secondary English teachers in Hong Kong where she found that most experienced teachers planned their lessons mentally, in a manner which resembled a list for grocery shopping as a reminder. She reports that sometimes this list of thoughts about a particular lesson is richer than the page-long written lesson plan. Calderhead (1984 cited in Tsui, 2003) states:

It is in planning that teachers translate syllabus guidelines, instructional expectations, and their own beliefs and ideologies of education into guides for action in the classroom. This aspect of teaching provides the structure and purpose for what teachers and pupils do in the classroom.

Tsui adds that teachers' own experiences regarding learning English language influence their teaching, although teachers need to be innovative and adaptable to the emerging approaches and techniques of teaching and assessment.

Although little similar research has been conducted in the Bangladesh context, there is one study that is relevant to the current research investigation. Podder (2007) reports on a mixed-method study with 19 secondary teachers from four secondary schools in the Narsingdi district in Bangladesh. Podder found that English teachers' average talking time was 66.12% and more than 54% (54.45%) of the teachers' total talk was in Bangla. Only two of the observed teachers were able to speak English fluently, and Podder reports that despite their oral English fluency, these two teachers' teaching approaches did not reflect the spirit of CLT.

According to Podder (2011), Bangladeshi secondary English teachers are trained at least once by one or more of the government or non-government organisations in courses such as the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP), Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP), Female Secondary School Assistance Project

(FSSAP), and the Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project (SESIP). He adds that the training the participating teachers received from those organisations has included approaches to teaching listening and speaking skills but there was no session on how to assess those two skills.

In a qualitative study conducted by Howard and Millar (2009) with 15 South Korean English language teachers, the teachers' perceptions of the applicability of Ellis' general principles for effective instructed second language learning were examined. The barriers which emerged from the study included the predominantly grammar-based examination system and teachers' own lack of oral proficiency in English. Other reported barriers included lack of student motivation, and lack of opportunities for interactions in English during class time.

### **2.3. Summary**

The purpose of the current study was to explore Bangladeshi secondary English teachers' understandings of listening and speaking skills assessment, and to determine the potential barriers and strengths of those teachers had who started assessing these two skills. As my study was a qualitative one, I tried to find mostly qualitative research-literature in this field, but as the number of studies conducted using qualitative methods was small, I have also reviewed quantitative and mixed methods studies. Little literature has been found regarding the assessment of English listening and speaking skills assessment specifically in Bangladesh. However, the reviewed literature did justify my choice of this project, and has also widened my knowledge about what was happening regarding listening and speaking assessment around the world. I describe in detail the qualitative research methodology and the methods I used to conduct the present study in the following chapter.

## Chapter Three: Research Methodology

### 3.1. Introduction

The present study, as stated in the introduction chapter, intends to address the following major research questions: How do Bangladeshi secondary English teachers make sense of listening and speaking skills assessment? What are the barriers and enablers for them in assessing these two skills? The study also explores what the teachers' current positions are regarding listening and speaking skills assessment. In order to investigate the answers to the stated questions, I employed classroom observation and semi-structured interview methods as the present study is a qualitative one. Through a qualitative research approach, it is possible to delve more deeply into the participants' worlds. I discuss the research methodology in detail in the following sections of this chapter.

### 3.2. Qualitative research

The term qualitative research is used as an umbrella term which refers to some strategies sharing certain characteristics. Data in qualitative research are termed *soft* as they are rich in detailed description of persons, places, and their conversations; and they are data which cannot be handled with statistical tools (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2003a) assert that qualitative researchers do not try to prove a hypothesis rather they are concerned with understanding the behaviour of the subjects in their own frame of reference. In other words, qualitative research is a study of a subject in its natural state, a study of as it is or as it does or functions. Accordingly, the area of qualitative research is the world of lived experiences in which beliefs and activities are influenced by the way of life in a particular setting.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003b) further add that qualitative research places emphasis on qualities of entities, ways of thinking and doing things, and qualitative researchers believe that

meanings are constructed through social interactions. They attach importance to how social experience is created and meaning is made and remade. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) echo this when they state that qualitative researchers collect data through continuous contact with the subjects observing what they do, and how they do that; after that they try to find out the reasons for doing it. The researchers enter into the world of the subjects under study and get close to them earning their trust and recording what the subjects say, observing what they do, and collecting photographs, newspaper articles, memos which can supplement the other collected data.

Willis (2008) stated that in quantitative research, a hypothesis or a presumption or presumptions, and the procedures of investigation to prove them are pre-set and researchers are not allowed to deviate from the pre-set target and strategies of investigation. In qualitative research, on the other hand, researchers take the emerging issues into cognisance in the course of the study and investigate how these affect the phenomenon in question. In qualitative research, preference goes to examining qualities rather than quantities although both the qualitative and the quantitative ways of investigations are complementary – one enriching the other – and quantities themselves are used to measure qualities (Kaplan, 1964, cited in Keeves & Adams, 1997).

McDonough and McDonough (1997) argue that the results of quantitative studies are usually transferable and true for other contexts, which means that the results of quantitative research can be generalised. In this type of research, objectivity and generalisability are closely related. On the other hand, the results of qualitative research are subjective from the researcher's or the participant's point of view. That is why the results of a qualitative study cannot be generalised, but can be trusted provided the research is sufficiently robustly carried out and reported.

There has been a considerable debate among methodologists and researchers about the value and legitimacy of the set standards for judging qualitative research. Questions have been raised particularly in relation to the degree to which the terms credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability can be applied to qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that as the purpose of qualitative research is to understand phenomena from participants' perspectives, the participants themselves are the right people to judge the credibility of the results. Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of qualitative research are generalisable. The results of a qualitative research study are not generalisable because they are the participants' standpoint; different people may have different viewpoints. But the qualitative researchers can enhance the generalisability by describing the context, settings, and the assumptions which were central to the research.

In order to be dependable, a qualitative researcher needs to state the ever-changing contexts in which the study was conducted, and how the course of the study was affected by the changes. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results of a qualitative study can be confirmed or supported by others. In order to increase the rate of confirmability, a researcher needs to document the procedures of checking and rechecking the data throughout the study; search for and describe instances contradictory to the prior observations; and can get the data audited in order to check any bias and data-distortion (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### 3.2.1. Observation

Observation is considered to be a key method in much social and behavioural sciences research (Alder & Alder, 1994, p. 389, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a), and the foundation of ethnographic projects (Werner & Schoepfle, 1987, p. 257, cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003a). In any kind of social research, a researcher has to observe what is happening, what the gesture and posture is to infer if the expressed words are corroborative or contradictory.



Neuman (1997) states that if the researcher goes to the subjects' everyday work place and behaves as a member of the subject community being observed, it is called participant observation. He also adds that in qualitative research, a researcher collects data through careful watching, listening, smelling, tasting, touching, and so on; that is, a researcher uses their sense organs for data collection. They try to capture the physical setting in which they collect data. Denzin and Lincoln (2003b) state that social science researchers have to keep their eyes on the subject(s) as well as the surroundings.

Neuman (1997) points out that qualitative researchers look for the colour, size, position, setting of things such as furniture and equipment, tidiness and untidiness, and they attach importance to trivial and everyday details because qualitative researchers believe that the way of life and living of the subjects is expressed through them. Not only that, a qualitative researcher has to consider the context in which an event happens, because if every detail is not noticed, full understanding of the events is missed.

### 3.2.2. Semi-structured interview

Hollway and Jefferson (2000) state that, interviewing the respondents with a series of questions is one of the most common and popular qualitative methods used in social science research. An interview is a kind of conversation usually between two persons one of them being the seeker of responses from the other (Gillham, 2000). Interviews are usually of four kinds: informal, unstructured, semi-structured, and structured (Bernard, 2006). Gillham (2000) claims that, interviewing or eliciting responses may benefit the interviewer or the interviewee or the both of them or a section of people or the mass of people. Gillham further adds that the interviewer can gain knowledge about the subjects and their profession, the subjects may get solutions to their professional problems, or they can be more insightful about their profession through reflection on the questions asked during the interview. The

findings of the interviews can also highlight some real problems and show the ways to solve them, thereby benefitting a bigger section of people.

Gillham (2000) additionally points out that in an interview conducted by a qualitative researcher, the direction of conversations is guided, not controlled, by the interviewer. Although interviews are divided into categories such as informal, structured, semi-structured, and unstructured, the “structured-unstructured dimension is false” (Gillham, 2000, p. 3) because experienced and expert interviewers always have an interview structure which they follow although they ask a variety of probes in a situation where needed. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), most interviews begin with small talk with a view to developing a rapport with the interviewee. Gillham (2000) points out that an interview should be started with a simple question and from a very wide point of view and then gradually it should delve more deep on the basis of the research question(s). He further adds that a good interviewer must be a good listener as well as a good observer in order to be able to read the non-verbal cues.

Interviewing can be done in different ways including face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, interviewing through audio-video technology, and so on. Bernard (2006) states that interviewing ranges from the informal interactions to highly formal interactions with the subjects. Bernard also adds that the informal interview is an interview which lacks structure and control, and the interviewer just continues their conversations during the daily activities of the subject(s) and at the end the researcher jots down their field notes from memory.

According to Bernard (2006), an unstructured interview is a kind of informal interaction and it is done with the consent of the interviewee but the respondents enjoy the freedom to tell as much as they like. The interviewer must have a plan but their target is to know the worldview of the subject(s). When the researcher wants to know about the lived experience of the

subject(s), unstructured interviewing is used. Usually ethnographic interviewing is unstructured.

Bernard (2006) further adds that semi-structured interviewing is similar to the unstructured interview but the interviewer has some written questions as a guide so that they can cover the target areas during the interviewing; and these written questions are supplemented by probes during the interview. Semi-structured interviewing is good for very busy and high profile people. It has sufficient focus but it is not so formalised that the respondents cannot introduce their own ideas or topics into the interview.

A structured interview is a formal interview where the interviewer asks similar or in most cases the same questions from a list made already for this purpose. Questionnaires are a kind of structured interview when asked face-to-face (Bernard, 2006).

### **3.3. Design of this study**

I used observation and semi-structured interview methods because data collected through interviews and observations could be compared, and the observations could give clues to asking suitable questions in the interviews.

#### **3.3.1. Participants and Settings**

I invited six secondary school English teachers from four different schools situated in three different districts in Bangladesh to participate in this study. I piloted my observation and interview with one of those teachers with a view to developing my observation skills and minimising faults with the interview questions and questioning style, to determine the best ways to observe the participants as well as their teaching, and to gain a better understanding of the wider context of the participating teachers and their teaching and assessment practices. I included the data from the pilot study in the final analysis as there were only a few minor

changes in the observation checklist and the interview questions after the piloting. Initially I chose six teachers although two more were considered in case someone showed a lack of interest in being my research subjects or I myself might not choose to include someone after preliminary talks with them. The basis of the choice was their reputation as English teachers and their interest in my project.

Preliminary information about the teachers was supposed to be collected from the District Education Officers (DEOs) as the DEOs are responsible for secondary education and they often visit schools and conduct academic as well as administrative supervisions. Although the DEOs had many pieces of information about the schools, they did not have information such as who were the skilled English teachers. Then I myself chose two from my experiences as an English language teacher educator. I had observed the teaching of those two as part of another master level study five years ago. I selected others on the basis of the recommendations of other English teacher educators; they said that the recommended teachers performed well in the 24-day long English language training courses in terms of active participation in debates on the current issues related to English language teaching-learning, assessment strategies, as well as in the pre-and-post tests. The teachers selected were from Dhaka city, Gazipur, and Narsingdi districts. I planned to select three female and three male teachers but only one female English teacher was recommended. The participants ranged in ages and in socio-economic background which helped me to get a world view of different kinds of teachers about language assessment in general, and listening and speaking skills assessment in particular, and to investigate whether teachers' understanding regarding language assessment differs because of being in different socio-economic and edu-cultural settings. Usually the teachers teaching in the capital city are considered more aware of methods and techniques of teaching and assessment than those teaching in the rural schools because the availability of resources is different in terms of both quantity and quality. All the

participants have been assigned pseudonyms. The participants' education, age, experiences as well as profession-related information are presented in the table in the following table.

Participants Information Table

Name	Age	Experience in yrs	Sex	Education	Professional degree	Training	School location
Atanu	32	8	Male	BA	B.Ed	ELTIP, CPD	Narsingdi district (Village)
Ali	34	10	Male	BA(Hons), MA (English)	No professional degree	ELTIP, CPD	Dhaka city
Abonti	39	12	Female	BA (Hons), MA (English)	B.ED, M.Ed	ELTIP, CPD	Dhaka city
Abu	35	7	Male	MA (English)	B.Ed	No training	Gazipur District (small town)
Kamal	41	16	Male	BA	B.Ed	CPD, PD (UK)	Gazipur District (small town)
Wadud	38	12	Male	MA (English)	B.Ed	ELTIP, CPD, ETTE (BC)	Narsingdi District (Village town)

In order to gain access to the participants and the schools, I went to the schools and personally talked to the head teachers and the English teachers about my proposed research, and tried to establish a rapport with them through several visits. Harrison, McGibbon, and Morton (2001) state that reciprocal interaction between the participants and the researcher is supposed to make the researcher's access easier. I told the English teachers that if I wrote about their thoughts and experiences about assessing students' aural and oral language skills, other teachers could benefit from their rich experiences. Although I got a recommendation for

five English teachers from the English teacher educators, I worked with only four of them and two more were my own choices. Initially I had a plan to select one teacher from one school but when I was in the field, I did not take the risk of running out of time because I had around two and a half months in total to select participants, communicate, interview and to observe them.

This study was financed by the government of Bangladesh, which gave me easier access to secondary school English teachers. However, this government financing did not mean that the schools and the teachers were bound to co-operate with me in this research project. My welcoming behaviour and assurance of confidentiality and anonymity, and their freedom to withdraw from the research at any stage helped me gain agreement from teachers to participate in my study.

### 3.3.2. Tools for data collection

I prepared an observation Checklist (Appendix 1) which I used during the teaching observations although I noted down other happenings or activities which my checklist did not cover. I prepared a set of semi-structured questions which I intended to ask during the pre-and-post observations interviews (Appendix 2) although those questions were supplemented by some probe questions as per the demand of the situations. Another form called 'background information for teachers' was prepared to collect the participating teachers' information (Appendix 3).

### 3.4. Data collection procedure

The following sections describe in detail how I collected data through observations, interviews, and through using a form called 'background information for teachers'.

### 3.4.1. Observation

I observed the respondents in the classrooms and in the school settings within a period of two months from mid December 2010 to the first week of February 2011. Each of the respondents was observed two times, once while teaching a listening lesson and once while teaching a speaking lesson. I started my field work after I had some interactions with the participants. This gave me more understanding of the settings and provided me with the opportunities to notice what the teachers did, how they did it, and why they did what they did. I made an observation schedule through talks with each of the six participants. They told me what topic they would be teaching, what class, and the time of teaching. On the appointed day, I reached the school at least ten minutes before the class began. I tried to be somewhere close to the participants, observing informally what they did before they entered into the classrooms. I failed to observe five teachers before five teaching sessions because they entered the scheduled classes directly from another class but I did manage to observe those five teachers before at least one teaching session. Only one teacher, Ali, was unable to be observed, as he came from other classes in both cases.

I would go with the teacher and sit at a back bench or desk from where I could see the whole class. The teacher would tell the students who I was and what the purpose of my going into the classrooms was. I recorded the activities of the teachers, wrote about the classroom environment and setting, and other observed things on the observation checklist and other comments regarding what I observed. I thanked the students after the teachers finished their teaching and left the classrooms with the teachers. I wrote a memo throughout my fieldwork. I studied the field-notes again and again, and kept on adding information to them from my recollections. The observations which I conducted outside the classrooms were done informally. The formal teaching observations were in between the two interviews.

### 3.4.2. Interviews

I conducted two interviews with each respondent using the semi-structured set of questions referred to earlier. The first one was on the day before the first observation and the second one was on or after one day of the second observation. I made an interview schedule in consultation with the participating teachers although I had to make some changes for some unavoidable reasons such as a participant's being ill and one teacher's urgent leave for family matters. I talked to another teacher to replace the one who was ill although I had finished pre-observation interview with him. I talked to the new participant and finished consent form signing with him and the head teacher of the school, made a schedule for the interviews and the observations but on the first interview day, I did not find the teacher at school and the head teacher told me that he was ill with flu. By this time the previous participant whom I thought I would exclude, got well again. I went back to my replacement participant notifying that he was no longer needed. However, apart from the mentioned incidents, everything went according to the schedule. The pre-and-post-observation questions were related but different. The second interview provided me with an opportunity to explore areas I failed to cover initially, as well as any issues which I observed during their teachings. The interviews as well as the observations helped me to cross-check what they said in interviews and what they practised in the classrooms. The interviews were planned to be around 20 minutes each but two participants took around 30 minutes in each interview. I tape-recorded the interviews with the prior permission of the interviewees and transcribed those afterwards. Finally, after the second interview, I handed in the transcribed interviews to two of the participants and got them checked but I could not give the transcriptions to the others because of time constraints. As a result, the four other participants' interviews remained as they were transcribed.



### 3.4.3. Teachers' Information collection

I gave the 'background information form for teachers' to the participating teachers just after the first interview with each of them and asked them to give me the filled in form any day before the scheduled last interview. I asked them to consult me in case they failed to understand anything.

### 3.5. Data analysis

Taylor and Bogdan (1998) state that qualitative data analysis is not a mechanical process; it involves inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorising. First of all, I read and re-read the transcribed interview data and observation field-notes in order to internalise the data through reflecting on them. After reading the interview and observation data several times, I developed a coding system, underlining the text in different colours and putting the codes in the margins. The data matching no category was put into a separate category because qualitative data analysis is a kind of search for types, classes, sequences, processes, patterns, and so on (Seidel, 1998) and labelling data with codes enables a researcher to sift out what the data are saying (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). As suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), I put similar coded data into categories, which were developed around the interview questions as well as observation findings. Then I tried to find links among the codes. The qualitative data analysis process is not linear; it is always like going back and forth relating things, events, and themes. Then, after a lot of pondering over those things of interest, they were put into a logical order in the report.

### 3.6. Findings presentation

I presented the findings inductively under the main themes because qualitative researchers use analytic induction strategies to present the findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Taylor &

Bogdan, 1998). The findings could also be presented under the interview questions because the interview questions are associated with some themes (Chung, 2009). In presenting the findings, I narrated, supported with quotes, and gave my own reasoned interpretation. Themes started to emerge during transcription of the interviews, writing, and rewriting of the observation notes. The findings of the study were supported, as appropriate, with evidence from the interview transcriptions and observation field-notes. Then finally, the findings were related to the current literature in discussion chapter.

### **3.7. Rigour and trustworthiness**

Lichtman (2006) states that rigour and trustworthiness are issues which are related to the methodology of research, research design, engagement of the researcher in data collection, data processing and data analysis, validity and reliability of the data or findings, and ethical matters. To be specific, trustworthiness includes rapport, safety, honour, and obligation (Harrison et al., 2001). Rigour protects the researcher against bias and enhances reliability of the findings. In other words, rigour measures the degree of trustworthiness of a research. I maintained rigour through systematic and conscious design of the research, truthful data collection, careful analysis and interpretation of the data with reference to the existing literature and through describing in detail the research methods, data analysis process, and informing the readers what I had learnt all the way through the research journey.

### **3.8. Ethical issues**

It is natural that cultural and moral-standard differences between the researcher and the subjects can be problematic. I duly applied to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC), University of Canterbury, New Zealand, who were convinced enough to give me the approval as they found the project to be non-threatening to the participants and

to the community I was going to work in (Appendix 4). I made it clear to the ERHEC that I was aware of the perceived ethical issues and agreed to follow the guidelines set by the ERHEC. On top of that, I had a letter issued from the Director General (DG) of Education, Bangladesh, allowing me to work with schools and school teachers (Appendix 5). The letter did not in any way compel the schools and the school teachers to cooperate with me. It just provided permission for me to work with schools and school teachers of Bangladesh.

Other possible issues were addressed by ensuring the participants' confidentiality and anonymity, and by providing all the six participants with 'information letters for teachers' containing information about who I was and the processes involved in the study (Appendix 6) to ensure that they signed the consent form (Appendix 7) being fully informed. Glesne and Peshkin (1993) point out that written consent can never ensure a symmetrical relationship between the researcher and the participants, but the consent paper signing can at least contribute to the empowering of the participants. I maintained confidentiality regarding the data and the names of the participants as well as the participating schools.

Although the participants and the schools cannot be identified in any reporting of the project, I am aware of the fact that a limited number of people may be able to identify some of the participants from their descriptions, due to the small number of participating teachers and schools. However, as the number of secondary schools in a district is more than 300 on average, it would be difficult and in some cases impossible to identify the schools and the participants from any reporting. The data were also kept secure by storing electronic data in a password protected computer and hard copies of the field-notes and interviews in locked storage at the university. Moreover, I was always aware of the potential power-relations and never applied any pressure to the participants. Also, the participants were reassured of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research without consequences. I shared my power with the participants by putting them in the position of specialists who knew much more than I

knew, and who were the sources of information making me knowledgeable about the listening and the speaking skills assessment at secondary schools in Bangladesh as well as barriers and enablers English teachers have in assessing those two skills. I strictly avoided any deception, described in detail what I was going to do on a particular day, and sought their permission before I started my work. Cultural problems did not arise as I myself am a member of that society and I am familiar with the culture of the secondary schools in Bangladesh through my experiences of teaching at government and non-government secondary schools as well as my school visits during the teaching practices of the Bachelor of Education students.

Other ethical issues such as informing the head teachers of the schools with an information letter (Appendix 8) and collecting their consent in a consent form (Appendix 9) were duly dealt with, well before the observations and interviews began.

### **3.9. Definition of key terms**

It is useful at this stage to clarify terms and terminology which may not be known to general readers. This also signals to readers who are more familiar with this field of study the specific meaning of these particular terms in the context of this study. Key terms used in this report are explained below.

#### **3.9.1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

CLT is an approach to language teaching and learning where student-centred teaching and learning is emphasised. In this approach students are involved in practising the target language while teachers work as facilitators creating language practice opportunities in the classrooms. This approach emerged in the early 1970's as a result of the perceived failure of other teaching methods such as the Grammar Translation and the Audio-Lingual methods.

Littlewood (1988) states “one of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view” (p. 1). Littlewood further stresses that situation is important in CLT, and he places emphasis on ‘meaning’ over ‘form’ of the target language.

### 3.9.2. Grammar Translation Method

Traditionally, this method entails teachers reading out the target language text to students and translating it into the students’ mother language. As such, teachers dominate the class, doing almost all the activities, and the students remain relatively passive in the classroom. Grammatical rules and accuracy assume more importance than fluency in this method; that is, in contrast to CLT, ‘form’ is more important than ‘meaning’ in this method.

### 3.9.3. Assessment

Educational assessment may include the process of documenting an individual student’s, a group’s, or an institution’s achieved skills, knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. This study considers assessment in terms of students’ four language skills in general, and listening and speaking skills assessment in particular.

### 3.9.4. Barriers and enablers

Barriers in this study are those factors which apparently discourage learners to practise listening and speaking skills. Besides, factors which help teachers avoid assessment of students’ listening and speaking skills are considered to be the barriers. Aspects which are apparently favourable to start listening and speaking practice as well as aural-oral assessment in Bangladesh secondary schools are considered enablers.

### **3.10. Summary**

Choosing appropriate research methods, preparing data collection tools, observing the participants without bias, sharing their ideas in an unthreatening environment, administering the study appropriately, coding and categorising the data, maintaining rigour and trustworthiness, and last but not the least being aware of ethical issues are all important factors in a qualitative research project. I was, as a qualitative researcher, always aware of those issues.

## Chapter Four: Findings

### 4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I have presented the findings in terms of teachers' understandings of listening and speaking skills assessment as well as the barriers and enablers they experienced in assessing those two skills. The identified barriers to the assessment oral-aural skills are: teachers did not have to assess listening and speaking skills of students; teachers assessed students' written work to check linguistic accuracy; English was taught mixed with Bangla language; curriculum needed restructuring to start listening and speaking assessment, the apparent enablers are: teachers' desire for training in listening and speaking skills assessment; teachers' awareness of the importance of listening and speaking skills assessment; and the participating teachers' resilience and optimism about starting listening and speaking skills assessment. Although the teachers did not assess listening and speaking skills, they had their own clear ideas about starting aural-oral assessment in the framework of the present English curriculum.

Since the teachers spoke and taught English as a foreign language which they did not have to use outside the classrooms, there were some grammatically incorrect sentences, repetitions, and fillers in their interviews and teaching. When I recorded what they had said, I kept the grammatically incorrect sentences and the improper use of words as the teachers indicated but I gave the right words in brackets in some cases to make the meaning clearer, and avoided the fillers as well as the repetitions in using their quotations. I present the teachers' understandings, ideas, beliefs, as well as barriers and enablers they experienced regarding listening and speaking skills assessment in the following sections as findings of the research.

#### 4.2. Teachers do not have to assess listening and speaking skills

A key barrier identified by this group of teachers was the invisibility of listening and speaking skills within the assessment system. In the current English language assessment practices, teachers have to assess reading and writing skills as a requirement of the English curriculum but they do not have to assess listening and speaking skills of students. As cited in the chapter one, these two skills were not assessed or tested in the SSC examinations. Abonti mentioned that although a few proactive teachers assessed listening and speaking skills informally, they needed higher authority decisions to include them in the formal assessment system in schools. She also sought favourable attitudes from the school head teachers regarding some marks allotment for listening and speaking. She commented:

We need decision from the school authority or higher authority to allot similar marks for listening. Our English syllabus is big enough to complete it with ease. So, teachers have to be careful to complete the syllabus instead of concentrating on the skill development of students. We can also allot some marks for listening and speaking in terminal examinations. Sometimes a small number of English teachers include these skills assessment out of their personal interest. Sometimes the head teacher creates pressure on us just to complete the syllabus. What they love to see is the syllabus completion focusing on the important aspects of the textbooks. Listening and speaking is not necessary for students to pass the examinations.

However, Ali expressed his disappointment even with the quality of present reading and writing skills assessment system, arguing that despite studying English at secondary schools for five years, some students could not write grammatically correct English sentences. He described his English language teaching experiences in different schools in the following way:

Sometimes we face too much difficulty because I teach students of class ten but they do not know how to write a correct sentence. So how will I teach him listening and speaking? He does not know how to write a correct sentence, he knows nothing about sentence, at that time it was very much difficult for the teacher and especially for me to concentrate on listening. But in this school, too, there are some very weak students in English; they do not know how to write a correct sentence.

He further added that about 30% questions were on true-false and multiple choices items where students had to put only a tick or a cross mark. Although that was one way to check



students' understanding of a text, it did not properly work because very often students answered on the basis of presumption or guess. According to him, it neither developed reading nor writing skills of students. He commented, "So students sometimes do not want or do not have much scope for learning English correct sentences".

Abu, who also assessed only reading and writing skills of his students, expressed his regret that the curriculum did not allow him to assess listening and speaking skills of students. He said:

As my syllabus (curriculum) does not permit me to assess this kind of knowledge or skills (listening and speaking), and as I have limited time in a period and a vast syllabus, I do not assess students' listening and speaking skills. It is applicable not only to myself, it is also the case with every teacher in our country. They have very limited time period but they have vast syllabus.

Another teacher, Kamal, also argued that he did not have scope for assessing listening and speaking skills in his schools because the curriculum had not been designed to assess the four language skills. He claimed:

According to our teaching method and the method of taking exams, we only judge (test) their writing skills. But we do not judge their speaking or understanding (listening) capacities. These are the main difficulties because our curriculum is not well equipped and well designed to take the test according to judge from all sides. It does not permit me to test listening skill of students.

Wadud, who taught in a village town school, and who was trying to introduce listening and speaking skills assessment to his school, expressed his unhappiness and despair that listening and speaking assessment was not till then introduced even after 15 years of the CLT introduction. He said, "I have to say, in our country the testing (assessment) system is faulty. Only two skills, reading and writing, are tested. Listening and speaking is ignored".

Two other teachers in this study expressed disappointment because they could not involve students in practising and assessing listening and speaking skills. They commented:

Although I am personally interested in practising and assessing listening and speaking skills, students sometimes are reluctant as this skill is not judged (tested) in the examinations. That is, there are no marks allotted for listening. As a result, students are not seen to be attentive in listening sessions – Abonti.

Most students are not interested to do the extra work of listening and speaking practice as it is not assessed in their year final and SSC examinations. Students' main target is to pass their examinations with good marks or grades. So, they never try to go beyond their syllabus. In our syllabus there is no mark for listening and speaking. That's why student always try to avoid it but we try to do it forcefully sometimes – Ali.

All six participant teachers expressed a similar sentiment. There was a call from the teachers to start listening and speaking practices and assessment but they did not do it as it was not expected by their higher authority and as students' SSC results were determined only on the basis of reading and writing skills achievement. All six participants reported that they did not usually involve students in listening and speaking practices and students were not interested either, as only reading and writing skills were tested in schools and the SSC examinations, although the textbooks focused on the four language skills. Abonti illustrated:

Although our textbooks focus on four basic language skills, we do not emphasise the other two skills because there are no marks allotted for listening and speaking. So teachers as well as students are not interested enough to practise and assess listening and speaking skills of students.

Ali commented that when a student got 90 or 95 marks in English without acquiring listening and speaking skills, most students avoided those two skills. Regarding speaking practice in schools, he stated:

Students are not habituate(d) of doing it (speaking) as it is not assessed. No marks are allotted for speaking. Here too, teachers and students avoid speaking like listening practice and assessment. They (students) tell me, "Why should I spend time for speaking when I get more than 90 marks in examinations? Suppose, a student gets 95 in English out of 100, how can I motivate them for practicing speaking?" Most of the students are happy with their marks or grades although the marks or grades are awarded assessing only reading and writing skills of students.

Abu spoke about the lack of English language practice opportunities in Bangladesh and he admitted that teachers did not create sufficient listening and speaking opportunities for students in the classrooms, either. He stated:

But in our country, the scope of speaking English language is very little. In our classroom system we don't give a student much opportunity to speak a language. They do not read English newspaper; they do not watch English movies or do not hear English news on television. So they are not familiar with English sounds or English words. As a result they always feel ashamed of expressing themselves in English.

Although four teachers taught in a traditional way despite having training in the modern methods and techniques of teaching English language, the formative assessment of their students' learning was limited to testing the knowledge contained in the text they taught. Teachers did not provide students with opportunities to speak and listen to each other. For example here are two excerpts from Kamal's and Atanu's teaching observations field notes respectively:

Kamal taught a lesson which had a focus on listening (actually it had focus on all the four skills although my main focus of observation was listening) in class ten (class X, unit 17, lesson 1, topic: The Maghs). He asked the students to listen to what he was going to read out. After finishing the listening text in a minute or so, he asked the students some questions. The questions were: where did the Maghs come from? Where do the Maghs live? Can you describe how to cook sticky rice?

Atanu taught a speaking lesson (the lesson also focused on reading and writing) in class ten (class X, unit 10, lesson 1, topic: Meeting Feroza). He read out and explained the text line by line although the reading was for students. When he finished, he asked nine students questions such as 'When did Becky come to Bangladesh? Where did Masum take Becky?' He did not utilise the opportunities in section A of the lesson to involve students in talking about a picture or describing the picture or asking and answering the questions given underneath the picture.

Two of the six teachers were found to assess their students' listening and speaking skills through involving them in listening and speaking activities. The field notes of Wadud read:

Wadud told his students that he was going to read out a text and from listening they (students) would have to answer the questions he was going to write on the blackboard. Then he wrote seven questions on the board. Two of the questions were short answer questions and five were of gap-filling type. The students copied the questions and then the teacher alerted the students to be ready for listening. The teacher read out the text from EfT in around two minutes (Class ten, unit 6, lesson 4, Topic: Junk Food). Then Wadud asked the students to compare the answers with the nearest students. The students talked among themselves for a minute or so and then Wadud told the correct answers. The students then compared their answers with the teacher's ones. The teacher randomly checked who corrected most of the answers.

Although listening and speaking assessment did not count for the school final result determination, Wadud assessed students' speaking too. The field notes on his teaching of speaking read:

Wadud first described how to introduce oneself to others. He told the students that they had to start with "I am ... (name)" or "My name is ...". He told the students to mention father's and mother's names and their occupations, introduce other family members, and to tell students' hobbies. Wadud introduced himself as a demonstration and then put the students in pair practices. After around three minutes' practices, he (teacher) stopped the students and asked them to introduce them one by one. When the students were introducing themselves, Wadud asked them some supplementary questions to prolong the conversations.

Abonti taught both listening and speaking in class six. Although there was no listening and speaking assessment in the school assessment system, she assessed her students' listening and speaking skills out of a sense of responsibility to her students. The next two excerpts are from Abonti's two teaching observations field notes:

In her listening class, Abonti asked the students to guess what the picture of the textbook was about (Class six, unit 2, lesson 7, topic: Belal's Family). Then she asked the students to read the exercise given in the textbook so that they could fill in the gaps from their listening. The text was small and she could finish it in one minute. The students filled in the gaps during listening. After finishing reading, she asked the students to tell what they put in the first, second, third, and ... gaps. The students answered in chorus. I was not sure how she knew who answered correctly.

In her second class, she taught speaking skills. The field notes on her teaching of speaking read:

Abonti exploited the textbook picture in practising speaking. She involved students in pair-asking-and-answering questions for three minutes. Then she elicited answers from the students. The students answered her questions one by one. She did cross-checked students' answers with other students.

Probably, the earlier-mentioned four teachers considered English as a knowledge-based subject and they tried to know how much knowledge their students had learnt through questioning them although information questions can be asked to check whether or not students have understood a listening and a reading text. Although those four teachers involved students in pair and group work, the students were not seen to be absorbed in their work; some looked like they did not understand what their teachers asked them to do.

All six participating teachers did formative assessment in the classrooms but most of them did it in order to check students' content and linguistic knowledge. Four out of the six teachers did not assess listening and speaking because those were not required by the English language curriculum and the teachers were not trained to do that, but the other two did assess oral and aural skills out of their own interest and because they felt that they had a responsibility to their students.

#### **4.3. Teachers assess students' written works to check linguistic accuracy**

A second identified barrier was the teachers tendency to prioritise accuracy. While I was interviewing the teachers, it emerged that all the six teachers were inclined to value accuracy over fluency and they assessed students' language skills for different reasons. One reason that was obvious from their interviews was that they assessed students' language skills with a view to developing students' linguistic competence. "We teach grammar so that students can understand English when they read books, magazines, and articles in higher classes and so that they can write correct English," emphasised Ali. He further argued that "we teach the students grammar so that they can know the language (English) accurately." The aim of English language assessment for him was "to check the grammatical accuracy of students' language." Additionally he said, "A Bangladeshi student willing to learn English needs to memorise some important vocabulary and grammatical rules for accurate use of the language." Ali went further by saying that Bangladeshi students memorised answers to some specific questions to pass the examinations. He said:

They learn English by memorising grammatical rules and sometimes through translation. Mainly this translation is from Bangla into English although translation from English into Bangla was also very often used. Bangladesh schooling was examination oriented and questions are set mostly from the prescribed textbooks. In most cases, learners look for the important topics and memorise them to pass the exams well.

Wadud clarified the purpose of his students' language skills assessment as:

Through assessing the four language skills, I try to know whether my pupils use the language properly; and whether they can communicate using the target language. The main purpose of assessment is to check whether he or she has proficiency in that particular language.

Probably, Wadud talked about the written form of the communication and proficiency because listening and speaking skills were not assessed in his school, either.

Abonti stated that assessment told her about her students' progress. "We assess students to check where they are up to, I mean, how much students have progressed," she said. Kamal expressed similar views: "Specially, I take some assessment of the students to judge their development and the ratio of their learning. This is the main thing we test the students." Abu said, "We assess students to assess (measure) their ability or power, writing power" because "they have to communicate with someone else" using the language. So, it is important to check their communicative skills.

Although two of the six participants talked about the listening and speaking skills assessment, they never actually assessed them. They were in fact speaking about accuracy and communication in written form of the language because other skills were not assessed in their schools. This presents a difficult to overcome barrier for many staff, as they find themselves only teaching what is assessed.

#### **4.4. Teachers demanded training in listening and speaking skills assessment**

The fact that training in the area is critical was obvious in my interviews with the teachers. All the six participants stated that they had professional development training in teaching English, but in none of the training courses did they have any sessions on listening and speaking skills assessment. When I asked them about listening and speaking skills assessment, four out of the six English teachers failed to talk confidently about how they could assess those two skills.

Atanu who taught in a village school hesitated while speaking about listening and speaking skills assessment. His comments about listening and speaking skills assessment went:

At present time we are starting to assess listening and speaking skills. I assess these skills in the class once in a week. I read out a topic and then I will ask some the questions to the students what I said. When I have read out a topic, I will ask some questions to the students and then I ask one by one or some students answer the questions. And if they can give good responses, I will give them marks. Sometimes, I can also assess students' speaking skills from here, too.

Atanu further added that he could assess speaking skills by getting a student to read a text. He hesitatingly said:

Or, I can give a particular topic or article or a particular paragraph or essay to tell me about it in students' own language after reading it. At that time I assess who can speak well or fluently. I will give them good marks. Those who can perform well will get good marks and those cannot perform well will get less marks. In this way I assess listening and speaking skills.

During the teaching of a listening lesson that I observed, Atanu read out a text elucidating it line by line and sometimes word by word. In answer to a question during our second interview, his response was, "I have done it because it is our traditional system. But I think it is not right way. Besides, some students are unable to understand the meaning of the topic. So at first I read and clarify." This quotation indicated that Atanu needed rigorous training to understand the principles of how to develop students' listening and speaking skills as well as how to assess them.

Wadud attached importance to the training and motivation of teachers and the value of emphasising speaking as a life skill. He believed that although money would be required to start listening assessment because of preparing CDs and buying CD players, speaking could be started free of cost if only teachers were proactive and motivated. He asserted:

To start speaking does not involve money. Only teachers' motivation can improve the situation a lot. More or less every non-native English speaking country practises reading and writing. As English is taught for life, English is needed for life, English is needed to cope with the global trend, we must learn English, especially listening and

speaking; if not done so, I think it is not a language learning at all. So far as I know, non-native speakers of English are putting emphasis on speaking. I think, if we start, actually we need to; we have to attach proper importance to speaking. If we are encouraged and trained, assessment of listening and speaking skills will not be a problem.

Abonti attached importance to the continuous training for professional development of the English teachers. She asserted:

I got training one year before and this year I do not get any training. That is why I cannot develop myself continuously. So, I am not satisfied with my teaching. If I get the training, that will refresh me, that will inspire me to do better thing for the students. In Bangladesh, we do not get this opportunity randomly (often).

Ali asserted that the teachers themselves could start the listening and speaking assessment by allotting some marks for the two skills but he also emphasised the importance of training. He illustrated, “We can prepare some exemplars for listening and speaking tests. We can start with the exemplars and then can remove the weaknesses gradually. Government can also arrange training on how to deal with the listening and speaking assessment matters”.

All six teachers felt the need for training in listening and speaking skills assessment because all of them were keen for the introduction of listening and speaking assessment in schools as well as in the SSC examinations

#### **4.5. English is taught mixed with Bangla language**

A further considerable barrier identified was teachers’ own lack of fluency and/or lack of confidence in the use of oral English. One insight emerging from the interviews and observations was that teachers used Bangla, the mother language, randomly in English classes. Although all the six teachers conducted their classes mostly in English during my observations, three of them failed to communicate fluently and clearly; the students were, too, in most cases unable to understand those three teachers. Teachers’ and students’ ‘struggle’ with speaking as well as students’ lack of response indicated that English classes were not



usually taught in English. That is, neither teachers nor students were accustomed to this sort of teaching and learning practices. All the six teachers, too, frankly spoke that not only they but also most English teachers they knew, taught English mixed with Bangla. Wadud commented:

English teachers frequently use their mother tongue Bangla in their classrooms. That's why students are not motivated. If I use English to deliver my lecture, they (students) will listen, they are bound to listen because there is no other option but listening.

He maintained that no skill could be achieved without practice. He said: "It's a skill; it can be done only by practising that particular skill. So, it's our responsibility to speak first, they will listen. When they will listen, they will feel the urge to speak. Actually our classroom is bi-lingual".

Wadud, too, spoke Bangla in his teaching. The observation field notes on a speaking lesson taught by Wadud showed "Teacher asked some questions to some individuals in order to prolong the conversation. He moved around the class and used Bangla when students failed to understand what he said". When teachers did use Bangla, there was often a reason argued Wadud. For example, Wadud said that if students failed to understand an abstract idea or a new concept or a word or the meaning of a sentence, only then the mother language could be used. He pointed out:

Sometimes when they don't understand, I use Bangla and sometimes when they can't speak out their ideas in English, they use Bangla and I tell their ideas in English. But most often I use English and my students also try to speak English. Whenever they can't express their ideas in English, they speak in Bangla and then I translate them into English.

Ali who was fluent in speaking English and who taught in a city school spoke Bangla in his teaching. The observation field notes said: "teacher was fluent in speaking and the medium of instruction was English mostly but he translated some sentences into Bangla and told meaning of some words and phrases in mother language". Ali believed that students could

not understand him and so he had to use Bangla. The following quotation of his indicated that Bangla was common in the English class and other English teachers of his school, too, taught English with the help of Bangla. He argued:

Most of my students cannot understand me when I speak thoroughly in English. They ask me to speak in Bangla. The main reason might be they do almost never have to listen to English outside the classrooms. Every day they have seven classes, but only in one class they listen to English. So, it is very difficult for them to understand English.

He further added:

I can give you another example; think about our first or second girl in any class. They are very expert in English in terms of marks or grades they achieve but if you try to talk to them in English, they fail to talk to you because they are not habituated to speak and listen to English.

Every English class consists of 30 or 40 minutes. Some time was wasted in going from one class to the other. Thus this 30/40 minutes class time was reduced. Abonti said,

I believe that if the students only use their 40 minutes English class time and the school time, they will be speak English within a very short time. I think they will gradually develop both the listening and the speaking skills. We need to use our full potential to use English in the English classes; we need to conduct the English classes in English. If we use Bangla, students cannot learn English. We have to give them the opportunity to speak a lot and to listen a lot.

Kamal described the English teaching situation in the country from his experiences by stating that almost all English teachers taught English mixing it with Bangla. He said that the teachers did not speak English even in the English classes other than reading out a text or asking questions from the textbook exercise. He added:

It is mainly due to the lack of proper practice of the teachers. So the students also lose their interest to speak because English class is held in Bengali. Only topics is English but total discussion, conversation, and asking and answering is also run by in Bangla. So, this is the difficulties.

Kamal further asserted that the English teachers of Bangladesh had satisfactory level of linguistic competence but they lacked communicative capability in English. He stated for example:

I have also seen some of my friends, they easily could speak in English but when I face (talk) to them, then I could not keep it consistence (going) with them. Same thing is happening in the secondary level. Most of the teachers, especially English teachers, they understand a lot, they know a lot but when they approach to the speaking forum, they cannot respond as they should be.

Abonti regretted that they taught English using Bangla. She said:

Sometimes we conduct our class partially in Bangla and English. This is the situation of Bangladesh. If we conduct the whole class in English they cannot communicate with us because different levels of students are in the same classroom. But gradually we will have to conduct our English classes totally in English to better the present situation.

All six teachers commented that they had to speak Bangla because students could not follow their talking or instructions unless they were translated into the mother language. Three of the six participating teachers also lacked speaking skills in English although they had been teaching English for more than seven years (the teachers' information on page 27 shows that the minimum experience of the participating teachers is seven years and the maximum 16 yrs). They often paused during teaching English fumbling for suitable words, phrases, and tenses of verbs. This factor remains a real barrier for many teachers and highlights the need for well-trained teachers, who are themselves confident in the skills of speaking and listening in English. This presents a huge professional development challenge, which I discuss in detail in the next chapter

#### **4.6. Need for curriculum restructuring to start listening and speaking assessment**

Despite the very real constraints faced by teachers, there was also considerable awareness of the need for curriculum change and willingness to embrace this. Wadud pointed out that the present curriculum did not have any provision to assess the listening and speaking skills of students. The other five participants believed that there was very little scope to go beyond the curriculum as it was centrally designed and controlled. Wadud said that they should develop a

curriculum following the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) guidelines. He observed, “If I assess their fluency, we have to develop curriculum so that we can assess like IELTS test. There are some ways to test their speaking ability”.

He further elaborated by saying that there should be some guidelines and exemplars in the curriculum about how to assess the listening and speaking skills in schools. He emphasised:

We have to make a way out how to assess their ability in context of Bangladesh on speaking skills. An exemplar should be designed where teachers will find guidelines and examples of how to assess students’ listening and speaking skills. The present text books have some lessons on speaking practice activities which can be fully exploited. I think if we start, the government will take initiative.

All the remaining five participating teachers favoured restructuring the present curriculum to allot some marks for listening and speaking so that both teachers and students would be interested as well as feeling some pressure to practise and assess them. Ali emphasised:

But listening and speaking assessment can be started allotting 10 marks for listening and speaking each. If we are given order from our higher authority to include listening and speaking in our school assessment system, we will be bound to practise and assess listening and speaking skills of students.

“First of all, we need to allot some marks for listening and speaking. Listening and speaking are the two primary skills to learn a language effectively and it is imperative to include them in assessment system,” asserted Abonti. She expressed her need for some listening practice aids. “Although I conduct listening tests occasionally, I face some difficulties like absence of standard CDs or cassettes and any player to use in testing students’ listening skill.”

Atanu spoke for allotting marks for listening and developing CDs for listening practice and assessment as part of the English curriculum. He stated, “There should be given some marks for listening and speaking” and “we need in our school computer, television to play the CD and show films for listening”.

Abu was also aware of the importance of listening and speaking and he spoke for bringing change in the curriculum. “There is not a single number (mark) for assessing speaking ability of students. But as far as I know, learning through speaking a language is more permanent than learning a language through grammar based knowledge or grammar based activities,” he commented.

All six teachers argued for the reformation of the English curriculum by redistributing marks for all the four language skills including listening and speaking. They also highlighted the necessity of listening CDs and speaking exemplars for use in teaching and assessment of aural-oral skills. This in my view is a positive, enabling viewpoint that shows teachers are ready to ensure progress in the area for their students.

#### **4.7. Teachers are aware of the importance of listening and speaking practice and assessment**

Another enabling factor is the fact that all six participating teachers were aware of the importance of listening and speaking skills assessment. Atanu who taught in a village school says, “I think students learn any language by listening from their parents, from their teachers, and from their friends. Through listening, they can learn any kinds of languages.” He further put emphasis on the practice and assessment of listening and speaking skills because of their importance in higher education as well as the job market at home and abroad. He asserted:

To communicate with the foreigners, it is very important. Beside this, if any student or if boy or girl after completing their academic qualification want to get a good job, they have to learn English and they have to speak in English and they have to speak something after listening. If they do not know or if they do not well skilled in listening and speaking, they cannot go forward or they cannot perform better in their respectable positions. For this reason, practice and assessment of listening and speaking is important.

Wadud, one of the more experienced, skilled, and motivated teachers, emphasised that a language learning was not completed until and unless one became skilled in the four skills of the target language. He stated:

These two skills (listening and speaking) are inseparable part of language learning. So in our traditional teaching and learning system, these two important skills are ignored. They are important to practise because without being skilled in the four areas (listening, speaking, reading, writing), a language learning is incomplete.

He further emphasised that higher education all over the world was in English. In order to receive higher education at home and abroad and for getting jobs, students needed to be proficient in the four major language skills. He observed:

When our students go to receive higher education abroad or when they will go to another country where Bangla is not used, they will have to converse in English. If they do not understand what they are speaking or if they cannot speak English, they will face a lot of problems. In order to get a good job in the local or international job market, a good command over English language, especially in listening and speaking is necessary. So, for building a good career and to compete in the global world, we cannot but learn English.

Abonti put emphasis on the practical use of English language in the classrooms as well as its assessment as students did not have much opportunity to practise English outside. She offered the following opinion:

We do not have enough opportunities outside of the classroom to practise. We cannot practise speaking or listening outside the classroom. Because we are teaching in a Bangla medium school and we get only one or two classes in a day in English. Students do not have language environment outside the schools. So it is an opportunity for the students to practise these two skills in that class only. So we should practise it, without practising it, we cannot develop our skills. These are the first two skills to learning a language. If we do not listen anything, we do not understand anything. If we do not understand anything, we cannot speak.

Ali also spoke about the importance of listening and speaking practice and assessment at school level. According to him, young people can learn a language more easily than older people. For him, school was the best place and the students' age was the best time to learn a

language and this learning could be accelerated through the introduction of listening and speaking skills assessment. He believed:

I think it is very much essential and important to practise and assess both speaking and listening in the school level students. Because school level students are very young and especially they are good at learning a language; they are growing up day by day. So I think in this stage if they practise listening, gradually when they will be grown up, then they will be able to listen to other, they will be able to speak with other. So, I think it is very much essential for the students. Assessment of these two skills should be started so that they start practice them in school as well as at home. It is important now because we know that English is an international language and now we live actually or in fact we living in the global world. Here a man is not separated from the other world.

Abu and Kamal believed that without practising the four language skills, students had to face some problems in real life interactions around the globe. They reported:

I think listening and speaking practice and assessment is important because a student has to develop four skills – listening, speaking, reading, and writing. If he does not develop his listening and speaking skill, he won't be properly trained or he won't get proper command over English language – Abu

We know that our economy largely depends on the manpower who are staying abroad, who are doing different jobs in multinational company in foreign countries and send huge money every year. But in those countries, I have also taken some interview in the people, what is your problem there? They only said, "This is only I cannot communicate my views and ideas to them because I don't have much knowledge in English." So it is very essential to practise listening, writing, speaking, reading. All the skills should be developed from the secondary level – Kamal

All the six participating teachers, therefore, emphasised the national and international importance of speaking English for economic, and life-opportunity reasons. They asserted that listening and speaking should be practised properly because young people were better language learners. If listening and speaking were incorporated in the assessment system, those two skills would be practised and the students would not have to face as many language problems abroad when they went for higher education or for a job.

#### 4.8. Teachers are resilient and optimistic

The participating teachers said they faced many barriers such as class-load, consecutive classes, short class-time, large-multilevel classes, absence or shortage of resources, lack of opportunities for continuous professional development, preparing tests and examining papers. Besides those, teachers commented in the 'background information form for teachers' that they had to be involved in non-academic work such as invigilating the recruitment examination, preparing the national voter list, being on the sports committee, and so on. Despite these barriers, they were optimistic about making positive changes in the area of listening and speaking skills assessment. This was apparent in informal conversations after the last interview with each of them. All of them requested me to help them with suggestions so that they could start listening and speaking assessment in their schools. Ali stated in his interview that if teachers modelled speaking English, students would also begin to speak. He asserted:

We should start speaking English at schools from the very beginning so that students are habituated to English language listening and speaking. This happens in the English medium schools. In Dhaka there are many English medium schools and students and teachers there communicate in English, all the four skills of language are assessed there. As a result, students consciously try to be skilled in four skills areas.

Ali further added that as most guardians as well as family members were not able to speak English, schools could be the best places for English language practice. He suggested allotting some marks so that students and teachers were under some compulsion to practise and assess those two skills. He added:

Although all the guardians here in Bangladesh are not literate enough to take part in English conversation, schools can be best places for a foreign language practice. If some marks are allotted for listening and speaking, teachers and students will be under compulsion to practise and assess listening and speaking. Teachers can initiate listening and speaking with simple everyday English like - 'May I come in sir?', 'may I go out sir?', 'sir, I am sorry', 'sir, I am ill', 'I have a headache' etc.



As a result of my interview with Abonti, she looked encouraged and she said that she would start assessing listening and speaking skills in her school in consultation with her head teacher although it was not required by the assessment system. She emphasised:

First of all we need to allot some marks for listening and speaking. I can convince my headmaster to give the electronic equipments for taking a class effectively and to make a plan with discussion with the English teachers how to include listening and speaking in assessment system. I can convince them by saying that all the four language skills are interwoven and practising listening and speaking can also improve students' reading and writing skills. Listening and speaking are the two primary skills to learn a language effectively.

She expressed her strong belief by saying that the English teaching-learning situation might start to change positively if teachers and students utilised the current 35/40 minutes class time, although this 35/40 minutes teaching time for English was not sufficient according to her. She illustrated, "I believe that if the students only use their 40 minutes English class time and the school time, they will be able to speak English within a short time." She further added:

We need to employ our whole potential to use the English in English class; we need to conduct the English class in English. If we use Bangla, students cannot learn English. We have to give them the opportunity to speak a lot and to listen a lot.

Kamal asserted that it was possible to allot some marks for listening and speaking in his school. He said, "It may be also added 10 marks for listening, 10 marks for speaking. In this way exam system should be restructured."

Atanu hoped if some marks were allotted for listening and speaking tests, the situation might be changed. He explained:

I think in this way if a teacher assesses the speaking and listening in terms (terminal examinations), may be twice or thrice in a year, and add this marks to publish in the final examination results, students will be encouraged to speak or to learn English.

Wadud advocated for including listening and speaking assessment like practical activities in science subjects such as Physics, Chemistry, and Biology. He reiterated:

We have to include listening and speaking test in our present testing system. In our Secondary School Certificate examinations, we have practical exam in some subjects, especially in science subjects like Physics, Chemistry, and Biology. In Biology there are 75% marks for written test and 25% marks are reserved for practical test. We can also start by allotting 50% marks for reading and writing, 25% marks for listening and 25% marks for speaking tests. This can be done. For listening tests, there should have some audio tapes or some recording devices can be used for this purpose.

He asserted that resources should not be a barrier or excuse. Unless and until the electronic devices and other listening resources such as a standard CD and a guideline-exemplar could be managed, the test administrator could do it orally. He proposed:

We can do it another way. The examiners (test administrators) can read out a passage from any source like newspapers or textbooks, and then he will ask some creative questions, vocabulary related questions, true-false etc. This sort of testing should be practised in the classrooms. When it will be in the testing system, then teachers will make them practised in the classrooms. Students will not face much problem as they have experienced this earlier.

All the six participating teachers were resilient and optimistic about the positive changes in the field of English language teaching-learning and assessment. They were ready to do whatever was possible from their position. They believed that if listening and speaking practices and assessment were started, they themselves were ready to adapt, as well as act as agents contributing to the change.

#### **4.9. Summary**

The findings of the current study showed that because teachers did not have to assess the listening and speaking skills, they appeared to attach little or no importance to the practices of those two skills. Although all the six English teachers tried to teach the classes using English language, code switching between English and Bangla was common in English classrooms. Teachers acknowledged that they were more concerned about grammatical accuracy rather than oral fluency, the present English curriculum needed restructuring paving the way for

listening and speaking skills assessment and teachers lack training in the assessment of those two skills. Despite those barriers, teachers were eager to start practising and assessing listening and speaking skills. Although the participating teachers did not involve students very much in listening and speaking practices, they seemed aware of some ways of assessment and the importance of listening and speaking. Two of the teachers were also aware of what they could do themselves to include listening and speaking skills practice and assessment in the school assessment system locally and what aspects needed to wait for the authority decision. They said that along with the present curriculum reformation, they needed listening and speaking resources such as listening CDs and speaking exemplars to start the listening and speaking practices and assessment. The findings of the study are discussed and related to the current literature in the following chapter.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

### 5.1. Introduction

The purpose of the study was to learn about the understandings of the Bangladeshi secondary school English teachers in relation to listening and speaking skills assessment as well as barriers and enablers they face in assessing these two skills. Although assessment serves as a basis for giving grades or marks for a qualification, a check for learning progress, and as a feedback which creates further learning opportunities (Furnbrough, Duensing, & Truman, 2005), the study found that the Bangladeshi secondary English teachers did not have to assess listening and speaking skills of their students because the curriculum did not oblige them to assess those two skills. As a result, they did not involve students in practising those skills much in the classrooms. They taught reading and writing skills only with more focus on writing. All the six participating teachers favoured language accuracy over oral fluency and four of them, I noticed during classroom observations, considered English as a knowledge-based subject, not a skill-based one.

Another observation was that teachers taught and assessed students mixing Bangla with English, which is another aspect of English language teaching and assessment at secondary level of education in Bangladesh. Teachers seemed to be aware of the importance of listening and speaking practice and assessment and they realised that the restructuring of the English curriculum was important in order to start listening and speaking skills assessment. The findings described in the previous chapter showed how the six participating teachers perceived listening and speaking skills assessment from their experiences and through their lenses but it should be noted that some other English teachers who did not take part in this study might have different understandings about listening and speaking skills assessment as

well as barriers and enablers in assessing these two skills. However, the discussion focuses mainly on the findings of the current study.

I reported earlier that four of the six participants were teaching about the language instead of involving them in skills practice. Those four teachers tended to test students' knowledge about the contents of the topics through asking them information questions. Information questions can be asked in order to check whether students have understood a reading or a listening text but in this case students answered in a word or two where there were least opportunities to practise speaking. Although my main purpose was to explore the secondary English teachers' understandings of listening and speaking skills assessment and the barriers and enablers they had in assessing those two skills in schools, a plethora of other related factors emerged from interviews and observations. I now discuss all the findings in this chapter in the following sections under four headings: 5.2. policy regarding English language teaching and learning; 5.3. historical background of teaching English in Bangladesh; 5.4. impact of assessment on listening and speaking practices; and 5.5. teachers' preparedness.

## **5.2. Policy regarding English teaching and learning in Bangladesh**

I reported in the introduction and literature review chapters that, despite curriculum policy favouring CLT, English language teaching and learning as well as use of English in real life communication was not satisfactory in Bangladesh. The curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996) described the English language learning outcomes as “until and unless a public examination is devised that tests English skills rather than students' ability to memorise and copy without understanding, the aims and objectives of the curriculum and syllabus can never be successfully realised” (p. 152). The terminal competencies for listening set in the curriculum report (NCTB, 1996) for the students of secondary level were as follows: the students would be able to understand a series of instructions and commands; take

part in conversations and discussions on a variety of topics; understand any text when anybody reads it out; and listen for gist, specific information, and take notes. And for speaking, the terminal competencies set were: after finishing secondary schools students would be able to speak fluently and correctly in any situation; give a series of instructions and commands; initiate and participate in conversations on a variety of topics; express opinions logically; take part in debate; tell stories; and recite poetry.

In order to achieve the set learning outcomes in terms of skills, the NCTB prepared a text book for the students of each class of the secondary level named *English for Today* (EfT) in which topics were included on the four basic language skills. The NCTB prepared teachers' guides (TG) to help the teachers in using the EfT books properly. The government expected that the teachers themselves would speak and assess students' English language skills as per the curriculum expectations. Additionally it was expected that teachers would involve students in language use activities through which students would learn English. In reality, this did not happen because of lack of proper instructions and guidelines to schools and teachers from the higher authority. Out of the six participating teachers who were deemed to be better in terms of English language teaching skills, only two occasionally used the TG; two did not have any TGs and they were not sure where to collect them from either. One said that he did not need a TG; and one did have a TG but he used a 'guidebook' in teaching English. This guidebook was not the TG mentioned earlier; it was a notebook published on the EfT where teachers and students found word meanings, completed textbook exercises and above all, Bangla translation and pronunciations of the English text. The Bangladesh government prohibited those kinds of notebooks for teachers and students as those guidebooks were held responsible for destroying the creativity as well as skills practice opportunities of students and teachers. Shahidullah (1999) observing the poor English teaching-learning in Bangladesh

expressed his regrets that although some ELT professionals were practising CLT, it did not seem to work well in Bangladesh.

It seems likely that the reasons why teachers or schools do not involve students in listening and speaking practices and skills assessment are that these two skills are not assessed in the SSC examinations or the secondary English curriculum does not require teachers to assess them. Reading and writing skills are assessed as these two skills are tested in the SSC examinations. The education authority has not allotted any marks for listening and speaking skills for school examinations either. Why then should the teachers and students spend time and energy on activities which do not benefit them directly? In the test format provided in the curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996), no marks distribution has been shown for listening and speaking skills assessment. Podder (2011) argues that there is no valid reason why teachers and students would ‘waste’ time on listening and speaking skills practices and assessment when no value was attached to them officially. A similar situation is reported by Christ and Makarani (2009) in India where students are examination-oriented and examinations do not include listening and speaking skills. As a result, neither teachers nor students do care for listening and speaking skills practice.

Although a different story, I think it deserves a mention here that Bangladeshi secondary teachers assess students’ reading and writing skills in a way that rewards memory rather than understanding because the text which is set for students’ reading skill assessment is usually set from the EfT the contents of which the students already know. The curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996) provides the tests format where 40 marks out of 200 are allotted for testing students’ reading comprehension from ‘seen’ texts (the text which students have already read) and 40 out of 200 from ‘unseen’ texts (the text is supposedly unknown but in reality, in most cases, the unseen text is set from any of the prohibited guidebooks mentioned earlier). The question should be asked, how is it possible to test students’ reading

comprehension skills asking them to answer questions from the texts which have been already read?

As teachers do not have to assess students' listening and speaking skills, most Bangladeshi secondary English teachers do not practise speaking and listening themselves. As a result, most teachers do not have oral fluency although they have been teaching English for many years. Banu and Sussex (2001) report some other reasons for the deterioration in teachers' English language. They argue that the banning of English medium schools in 1972 and the Language Act of 1987 contribute a lot to the significant decline in the quality of English in Bangladesh resulting in the overall turn down of English among school and college leavers. Students of that period who were later recruited as English language teachers in secondary schools might not have learnt English well or they might not have been taught English properly or they might not be motivated enough to become competent English teachers. So, it might not be reasonable to expect better performance by them. However, those who among them studied English on their own and who improved their English themselves might have been able to teach better, no doubt. Podder (2007) reports that only two teachers out of 19 were able to speak English fluently although those two teachers' teaching approaches along with others who participated in the study did not reflect the attributes of CLT.

The Bangladesh secondary curriculum is centrally designed and controlled. Sometimes it is difficult for teachers to go beyond the designed curriculum. On the other hand, practising and assessing listening and speaking is not a requirement of the secondary English curriculum. So, even proactive English teachers cannot start listening and speaking practices and assessment without a decision or permission from the education authority. Still now, almost two decades since the introduction of CLT, most teachers encourage students to memorise answers and grammatical rules instead of favouring oral fluency alongside accuracy. Teachers confidently



said in their interviews that there was no provision to assess listening and speaking skills of students in schools and they were not sufficiently aware of the curriculum and syllabus report. This seemed to indicate that they have not read the curriculum document and for that reason they are not sure about what they are mandated to do. The education authority of Bangladesh seems to be aware of the importance of aural-oral skills of the English language from their introduction of CLT to the primary and secondary levels but it is not known why the curriculum planners and policy makers have not yet started to reform the English language curriculum focusing on English language practice as well as English aural-oral skills assessment.

### **5.3. Historical background of teaching English in Bangladesh**

Curriculum exists in two forms: ‘planned curriculum’ and ‘realised curriculum.’ The planned curriculum describes and prescribes ideal teaching practices and the realised curriculum is how the planned curriculum is implemented in actual classroom situations. Teachers usually implement the curriculum depending on their own beliefs and unique understanding of their environmental context (www.jalt.org, cited in Podder, 2007). Curriculum documents always speak about the ideal but it is the implementation which matters much more than the curriculum itself. Although the Bangladesh secondary curriculum document gives a mandate to English teachers in Bangladesh to use communicative teaching-learning approaches, Podder (2007) reports that in 2007 they used grammar translation methods where the mother language dominated the English classrooms. Memorising grammatical rules, translating into and from the target language were the approaches of language teaching and learning. The current classrooms observations and the interviews with the participating teachers show that the Bangladesh secondary English teachers’ favourite method of teaching English is still the grammar translation method. Even in 2011, teachers dominate the classes through more and more talking as well as doing almost all the activities, even those which are meant for the

students. This teaching-learning tradition has continued since the creation of Bangladesh or much before that time and may take time to change the mind-set of the English teachers.

My experiences as a secondary school teacher and then as an English teacher educator show that most English teachers of secondary level neither teach English in English nor do they practise speaking with students or even with other English-language-teaching colleagues. This might be another reason for the deteriorating standard of English teaching and learning in the country. Banu and Sussex (2001) mention a survey conducted in 1996 by the Press Institute of Bangladesh which revealed that 79% of the television viewers in Bangladesh with tertiary education preferred watching Bangla-dubbed English movies to the English ones. It is not known how many secondary English teachers took part in the survey but those survey findings might bear testimony to how much the English language standard among educated people had fallen in the country.

Although English is compulsory from class one in Bangladesh, no government documents so far have attached importance to or compelled teachers to speak English at least in English classes or to assess the aural-oral skills of the students. My experiences as a secondary school student from 1978 to 1983, and as a secondary English teacher from 1992 to 1997 tell that I was taught and I myself taught using the grammar translation method in the secondary schools. Now as a secondary English teacher educator since 1998, I observe most secondary English teachers' favourite teaching method is the grammar translation method. My English teachers used to read out the texts and clarify them in Bangla, give the Bangla meanings of the important English words and phrases, ask us to give the Bangla meaning of some sentences from the lesson or ask us for answers to some questions and then tell us to memorise answers to some questions. Sometimes they used to write the answers for us, and we would copy those in order to memorise them for examinations. I also taught English language in a similar way when I taught in secondary schools. The present study shows that still now most teachers use

this method in teaching English in spite of the fact that they have received either pre-service during their B.Ed course or in-service professional development training on how to teach English language.

My experiences as a teacher educator show that of the trainees who come for in-service B.Ed training (some teachers enter teaching in secondary schools without B.Ed training in Bangladesh but they are required to study the B.Ed course at some stage), even some who teach English do not take up English as a subject in fear that they might not do well in assessment. It is not compulsory even for English teachers to take English in their B.Ed course. Whether in-service or pre-service, teachers who undergo training gain skills during the training course. Their skills are obvious in their teaching practices as well as in simulation classes but those teachers fall back on the traditional grammar translation method when they go back to schools. Hopefully, the following section (5.4) highlights why teachers do not use their achieved skills in schools.

#### **5.4. Impact of assessment on listening and speaking practices**

Brown (2004) reports that assessment in education usually plays a positive role in transforming classroom practices although the impact of assessment is not always positive and sometimes there might be no impact. If some skills are not brought under assessment, some teachers and students usually use it as a basic reason for not practising them in the classroom. This is the case for Bangladeshi secondary English teachers. Scholars who focus on listening skills claim that students spend more time in listening as a way to learn than they do using any of the other communication abilities (Barker, Edwards, Gaines, Gladney & Holley, 1980; Davis, 2001 cited in Thompson, Leintz, Nevers, & Witkowski, 2004), but the Bangladesh secondary education authority has not yet made good progress on how to include listening and

speaking skills assessment in the existing assessment system in order to prepare students to learn through listening English.

Bangladesh English Language Teachers' Association (BELTA) in collaboration with English in Action (EiA) expressed their grave concern in a press conference over the minimal progress of English language education even after two decades of CLT introduction and they spoke in favour of curriculum reform including bringing change to the assessment system focusing skills in English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh. Dr Sharmistha Das, education adviser of EiA called for English language curriculum reform in Bangladesh in order to fulfil the need for appropriate teaching materials and a suitable assessment system ("English in context of Bangladesh needed", 2011).

Although tests and examinations have huge controlling powers to dictate classroom practices (Brown, 2004), the Bangladesh curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996) did not include the listening and speaking skills assessment in the assessment system. Contradictions prevail even in the curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996). The report declares that "the English language is not a content-based subject, but a skill-based subject. English is about practising four language skills" (NCTB, 1996, p. 135) and "teachers should ensure that a representative cross-section and variety of skills and sub-skills regularly contribute to this informal monthly assessment" (NCTB, 1996, p. 151) but the test structure given in the pages 153 and 154 of the same document shows that no marks have been allotted for listening and speaking skills achievement testing. The result is little or no aural-oral practice and assessment despite curricular expectations "The English language classroom should, above all else, be an interactive one. The students should practice English with the teacher, the teacher with the students, and most important of all, the students with each other" (NCTB,

1996, p. 135). In reality, most teachers and students do not practise English with each other as such since the practice does not bring them any direct benefits in terms of marks, grades, or any other way.

Some students and most English teachers are aware that “English in Bangladesh is strongly linked to socio-economic status” (Banu & Sussex, 2001, p. 125) and that includes listening and speaking skills; however, as “listening and speaking is not tested in the SSC and HSC examinations, teachers or school authorities do not take any initiative to put into practise and test them” (Podder, 2010, p. 31). Moreover, highly motivated English teachers who start practising and assessing listening and speaking skills on their own initiative, have to retreat in the face of resistance from the unmotivated students, guardians, colleagues, and sometimes from the head teachers if they spend time on listening and speaking. Sometimes they are warned by the head teachers for doing ‘worthless’ activities instead of preparing students for examinations (Podder, 2011).

Although, Nunan (1988) holds English teachers and curriculum planners responsible for deciding how to assess students’ language skills, most schools and most teachers are not willing to take on the extra load of practising and assessing listening skills or in some cases, they may be not aware of the curriculum directives regarding English language teaching and learning. Most students, too, are not interested in practising those two skills as they do not have any incentives in terms of marks or grades in the SSC or school examinations. Munoz and Alvarez (2010) state, classroom activities would be aligned to the assessment system when both teachers and students can establish the connections between the curricular goals and the assessment.

### 5.5. Teachers' preparedness

Even after fifteen years since the introduction of CLT, only two teachers were found to teach confidently. The other four teachers suffered from the lack of confidence. Those four participating teachers were not self-confident in speaking English, in using various English teaching approaches and techniques and in classroom management. They were expected to be skilled in teaching English, if not in listening and speaking skills assessment, because all of them had professional development training and long experience in teaching English. Moreover, they were selected on the basis of their better performance in different professional development training sessions. Yet training did not appear to have made four of the six teachers skilled in teaching although “training is the process of learning the skills that you need for a particular job or activity” (Collins Cobuild Dictionary, 2003).

In any sector, it is important to have a strong, well-qualified, dedicated work-force in order to develop a sector. In the education sector, too, there needs to be suitable people with relevant qualifications to achieve the aims and objectives of the curriculum. In Bangladesh, the secondary English teachers' qualifications are not well-specified. Although there are earmarked posts for English teachers in government secondary schools, there are no well-defined guidelines around who should teach English in non-government and private secondary schools or around what qualifications a teacher should have to be an English teacher. It was stated in the “staffing pattern for private educational institutions – schools - for disbursing government portion of the salary” (MoE, 1995) that graduates with no more than one third class/division could be appointed as a secondary teacher. One who studied English at graduation level or has a good command of English could teach the language but the characteristics of a ‘good command of English’ were not specified there. Moreover, well-qualified graduates with knowledge and skills in English are not readily available or those

having better knowledge and skills in English language look for more attractive jobs which earn them more money and sometimes higher social status than teaching.

Another factor relevant to the lack of English language skills among teachers is that English teachers have to teach other subjects such as Bangla, Social Studies, Religious Studies, and so on. I found in the study that just three participating teachers out of six taught only English subjects and those three teachers were considerably more fluent during teaching and in oral communication with me. Their oral fluency might have been attained during their student life but those three teachers said that they became more fluent in oral English through teaching English in schools as they had taught only English classes for a long period of 10/12 years. Their motivation and dedication helped them reach that standard in speaking.

It was already mentioned that the English teachers were trained but there was no session on listening and speaking skills assessment strategies in those training sessions. Although interested, the present study reveals that teachers are not well-prepared to start listening and speaking assessment without being properly trained in aural-oral skills assessment approaches, and constructing and using the assessment tools as well as resources. What they needed along with training was motivation. If they were trained, they could start practising and assessing aural-oral skills in their schools. Motivated teachers who take before-class preparation on how to teach and assess listening and speaking alongside other skills, gradually become skilled in teaching and assessing as pre-teaching planning is considered the most important process in which teachers engage (Kounin, 1970; Doyle, 1977; Yinger, 1979; Calderhead, 1984 cited in Tsui, 2003) but the Bangladesh education authority has not been able to ensure lesson planning or at least before-class preparation for teachers. Three of the six participating teachers reported that although they were aware of the importance of the written lesson planning, they only had time to plan their lessons mentally because of the heavy workload.

A culture of written lesson plans did not develop among secondary school English teachers in Bangladesh despite its importance in achieving the objectives of a particular lesson. The reality is that a good number of teachers in Bangladesh do not know what they are going to teach in the next class, let alone have planned the lesson. The present study revealed that one teacher had to ask the students what to teach that day although he had prior notice of my observation. Of course, he blamed their workload which did not allow them to make before-class preparation or to plan a lesson. According to that teacher, many teachers do not know what they are going to teach. Whatever is the reason, the result is ‘no lesson planning’ which may lead to poor performance by teachers thus hindering students’ English language learning opportunities.

It appeared from interviews and observations that four out of the six teachers did the same as their own teachers had done with them when they were students in schools. This aligns with Tsui (2003) who reports that teachers’ own experiences gathered during their student lives at schools influence their own English teaching. The other two teachers reconstructed their English learning experiences with the professional development training experiences. It is concerning, however, that the four participating teachers did not appear to have changed although they received training in CLT. Was the training insufficient to make them confident or were there faults in the training? A CLT classroom is expected to be student centred where students practise at least one or all the four language skills in a lesson, and where teachers are expected to involve students in such activities that influence them to practise the four language skills (Podder, 2010) but my classroom observations showed that all the six participating teachers talked much more than the students, reducing the scope for students’ language practice opportunities. They tended to provide students with the knowledge instead of involving them in skills practice. They appeared to create little opportunity for students’ listening and speaking. Only two of the six participating English teachers seemed to be



partially ready to teach communicative English but they did not feel able enough to assess listening and speaking skills of students. Although all the six teachers said in their interviews that children learn a language through listening to and interacting with others, in my limited observation this did not seem to be reflected in their classroom practice.

Despite a theoretical change in English teaching and learning at secondary level from the traditional to a progressive one, the interviews with the six teachers as well as their teaching observations revealed that schools and teachers were not prepared to attach much importance to the assessment of listening and speaking skills nor did the education authority take any initiative through training teachers in listening and speaking skills assessment or including aural-oral testing in the SSC examinations. Although all the six participating teachers were resilient, motivated, and optimistic about the inclusion of listening and speaking skills assessment because they were aware of “what is assessed becomes what is valued, which becomes what is taught” (McEwen, 1995a, p. 42, cited in Cheng & Curtis, 2004, p. 3), they did not appear willing to do so.

Although all the six participating teachers were trained in CLT approaches, what emerged from the study was that Bangladesh secondary teachers’ preferred method of teaching was still the grammar translation method. They attached more value to linguistic competence instead of communicative ability and this focus on accuracy led them look for students’ grammatical accuracy of written work mainly. As a result, students liked to learn the rules of English grammar to be accurate in writing. Ironically, students have to go to the British Council (BC) or to any other private English learning centres to learn to speak to be able to continue in higher education at home and abroad as well as to get better jobs (Podder, 2011) although only the students who come off a well-to-do family can afford this.

Only two of the participating teachers conducted classes using some techniques of CLT approaches but all the six teachers emphasised in their interviews that they used a mixture of Bangla and English in teaching English. There was frequent translation from and into Bangla they said, although the curriculum objective was to speak only English. The curriculum allowed English teachers to use Bangla when students failed to understand some abstract ideas. The curriculum and syllabus report (NCTB, 1996) stated “Bangla might only be used as a checking device where the teacher feels it appropriate to ensure that English has been correctly understood” (p. 153). It is interesting that Khamkhien (2010) reports a similar situation regarding English language teaching in Thailand where the Thai English teachers used Thai language to interact with students as a result of being unable to speak in genuine English despite the Thai government’s expectations of developing students’ English language skills through the maximum use of English by teachers in the classroom.

Although the participating teachers expressed their interest in the inclusion of listening and speaking skills in assessment framework, they badly needed a manual containing exemplars and guidelines about how to assess listening and speaking. They also needed CDs which they could use in listening practice and assessment. As teachers seem aware of the importance of listening and speaking skills, the first priority of the secondary education authority could be to redistribute marks in English language assessment covering listening, speaking, reading, and writing. A distribution of marks for English at secondary level in Bangladesh could be listening 25, speaking 25, reading 25, and writing 25 in each paper of English (Podder, 2011). The concerned authority can issue an order telling school authorities to start the practice and assessment of listening and speaking skills in schools.

In addition to the above-mentioned issues, English teachers have to face some other obstacles such as workload, time constraint, lack of resources, and large-multi-level classes. These issues need to be addressed in order to enable them to conduct their English classes and

assessment activities effectively. Although Brown (2004) comments that teachers need to assess students' language skills continuously in-and-outside classrooms, his suggestions might not be relevant to large classes with 60, 70, or more students. All the six participating teachers had to teach six or more classes a day. As a result they did not have time in-between classes to prepare for the next class or to take a rest and even to eat or drink tea or coffee, although they have lunch breaks. Besides, they have to prepare tests (question papers), examine test papers and assignments, and work on different committees such as sports, magazine, academic, cultural, and so on. The city school teachers are busy even in the weekends with recruitment tests held in their schools by different government organisations. The secondary teachers sometimes have to work to make the national voter lists and perform other government imposed duties. They comment in informal talking that some of this non-academic work is responsible, to some extent, for the low quality performances of teachers.

Another problem raised by the participants is the short class time. Thirty five or forty minutes for an English class was seen as not enough because if a teacher wanted to finish all the sections of every lesson properly doing all the prescribed activities, they needed around an hour. Moreover, it took a few minutes to go from one class to another class the class time being further minimised. All the six participating teachers complained that it was difficult to finish a lesson in 35 or 40 minutes even using the traditional method. They commented that communicative approaches required more time for students to practise the English language.

All the visited classes had student numbers ranging from 60 to 91. The teachers admitted that they could not take care of every individual student with limited or almost no resources other than the textbook because the class size was large and the students' skills and knowledge level in English were varied. All the teachers considered large-multi-level classes were a problem although Hess (2001) believes that the different calibre students could be seen as resources in

a language class and large classes are not a problem for language practice because students are able to listen and speak together when they practise the target language.

None of the four visited schools had technology to use in the language classes. My observations showed that students sit on joined and crowded benches in three schools and only one school had separate desks for each student. The chalkboards were not clear enough for writing to be seen as well as adequately understood. In line with other issues, these problems need also to be addressed.

It was winter in Bangladesh when I observed the teaching of the six participants. In three out of four schools, one or two windows of the classrooms I was in were broken and the students were shivering in the cold. In one school doors and windows were fine and they were closed so that draught could not come in but there was insufficient light as only a single light (bulb) was hanging from the ceiling just above the black board. As a result, students sitting at the back of the class could not read or write properly because of the dim light.

This study showed that teachers needed training, resources for listening and speaking practice, and restructuring the English curriculum to make way for listening and speaking practice and assessment. Although teachers suffered with work load, large multi-level classes, time constraints, and other environmental problems like cold or insufficient light, they were nonetheless optimistic about preparing for listening and speaking skills practice and assessment.

## **5.6. Summary**

Although there are many issues like contradictory statements in the curriculum and syllabus reports regarding listening and speaking practice and assessment, traditional teaching and assessment practice, lack of professional development training and teacher-student

motivation, and lack of listening and speaking resources, Bangladesh English education policy could be turned into a modern one with a little change in the assessment areas. If the education authority takes steps to reform the existing English curriculum and syllabus document keeping the provision for listening and speaking skills assessment along with other two skills, the English language teaching and assessment situation could change positively, making students value the skills of listening and speaking in English.

## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

### **6.1. Introduction**

In the beginning of the early 1990's, the government of Bangladesh put increased emphasis on the teaching and learning of English language rather than English literature with a view to developing the English oral communication skills of secondary students. Communicative English was introduced to class six in 1996 and then progressively to all other classes of the secondary level although the assessment system was not reformed to emphasise listening and speaking skills assessment alongside reading and writing skills. Although the teachers were trained on how to teach English, neither did they have training on how to assess listening and speaking skills nor was it obligatory for teachers or schools to assess listening and speaking skills although the textbooks contained lessons on the four basic language skills. As a result, comments Podder (2010), most English teachers continued to teach English in the more traditional way attaching greater importance to the learning of reading and writing and largely ignoring oral practice and assessment. The present study reveals that teachers are teaching 'about English language' instead of teaching and assessing 'English language itself'.

### **6.2. Limitations of the study**

This study was undertaken as part of a Master of Education degree at the University of Canterbury. It was time bound and I had to keep the sample size small in order to be able to conduct the field work in a period of three months. I could not cover madrasa (a stream of secondary education with more focus on Islam religion studies), English version teaching school teachers (the mainstream secondary curriculum exists in two versions. Bangla version: all the subjects excluding two 100-mark papers in English are taught in Bangla, and English version: all the subjects excluding two 100-mark papers in mother language are taught in English. English medium schools follow their own curriculum aligning with the O Level and

A Level curricula), and primary school teachers who also deal with similar English language curriculum. I could not also study the understandings of the policy makers, curriculum designers, head teachers, and students and their parents regarding listening and speaking skills assessment.

Another limitation was the short period of data collection. I was unable to observe what the participating teachers did throughout the whole school day. It would have given me more understanding of the complexities of English language assessment, especially listening and speaking skills assessment, in the school contexts if I had been with them for a longer period.

### **6.3. Suggestions for further research**

The focus of this study was to find out about the secondary English teachers' understandings about listening and speaking skills assessment and the barriers and enablers the practising English teachers had in assessing those two skills. Head teachers', students', and their guardians' understandings of the listening and speaking skills assessment were not explored. Moreover, this study did not explore the understandings of the policy makers or the curriculum planners. These areas could be usefully explored to gain further understandings of English language teaching and learning and aural-oral skills assessment that can benefit secondary English teachers, teacher educators, policy makers, curriculum planners, and students.

Furthermore, the present study did not look into the state of reading and writing skills teaching and learning, or their assessment. Other areas in the field of English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh which could be explored are: the effectiveness of English teachers, motivation of English teachers to implement CLT in Bangladesh, preparedness of teachers to start listening and speaking skills assessment, and the need assessment of the

practising English teachers in order to make them more skilled in teaching as well as in the four language skills assessment.

#### **6.4. Implications**

The six participating teachers became more conscious of the importance of listening and speaking skills assessment after being interviewed. I understood that from their questioning me about the listening and speaking skills assessment and from their seeking help from me in future to start listening and speaking assessment in their schools. They questioned me when I finished my second formal interview with each of them. They said that if the listening and speaking skills assessment were included in the assessment system, they were mentally ready to do that because they themselves were aware of the necessity and importance of those two skills. I promised I would send them the summary of the study and as I would write about the findings in national daily newspapers, they might take an initiative which is feasible for them to start listening and speaking assessment. I hope that these findings have implications for other English teachers who will read the findings of the study. Publishing further academic articles on the study might help the secondary English teachers to consider further listening and speaking assessment strategies, as well as the inclusion of practice and assessment of the two skills.

The policy makers as well as the curriculum designers, hopefully, will find opportunities to consider the findings and recommendations, such as restructuring the secondary English curriculum in order to pave the way to including listening and speaking assessment alongside reading and writing skills. A copy of the thesis will be submitted to the Bangladesh Ministry of Education library and it is to be hoped that the findings and the recommendations will be of interest to both policy makers as well as the curriculum designers, motivating them to consider possible changes to the present English language curriculum.



On a personal level, the study has widened my outlook about the present status of English language teaching and learning at secondary level in Bangladesh in general and listening and speaking skills assessment in particular. I have become much more aware of the challenges the participating teachers faced and the prospects they have, especially in regard to of listening and speaking skills assessment, which would, no doubt, help me to better understand the teachers during my teaching and training sessions with the Bachelor of Education students as well as with in-service professional development trainees. The findings of the study may also help other English language teacher educators.

### **6.5. Summary**

In conclusion, I would like to suggest that if measures are taken to train the secondary English teachers in Bangladesh in listening and speaking skills assessment, and to prepare listening and speaking practice and assessment resources, some of the current barriers to developing students' aural-oral skills may be addressed. Alongside the training of teachers and preparation of appropriate assessment resources, the present system of assessing only reading and writing skills could be examined.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Observation Checklist

Name of the school:

Name of the teacher:

Class of teaching:

Time of teaching (from – to):

Date: / ----/2011

Lesson number:

Topic:

Total Number of students:

Present:

Male:

Female:

Skills focused:

Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing
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	Categories or behaviours	What observed
Before Class	<b>Teacher's activities before the class:</b>  Preparation for the class - reading – lesson planning – Teaching aids preparation/collection – Others –	
Student-related information	<b>Opportunities for students'</b> -speaking -listening	

	-reading  -writing	
	<b>Students' use of English:</b>  Speaking English with  -teacher  - Classmates (Ss-Ss interactions)	
	<b>Students' activities:</b>  Pair work –  Group work –  Individual work –  Pair checking –  Drilling –  Debate –  Role play –  Listening –  Speaking-  Reading –  Writing –  Others –	
Teacher- related information	<b>Teacher's instructional language:</b>  Teacher speaks English –  Bangla –  uses full sentence –	

	<p>chunks/words/phrases –</p> <p>teaches grammar explicitly/implicitly –</p>	
	<p><b>Activities organised:</b></p> <p>teacher asks Ss questions –</p> <p>way of feedback –</p> <p>Teacher conducts listening activity (reads out a text) –</p> <p>Others(teacher gets answers checked in groups, pairs, or check s individually, tells answers etc) –</p>	
	<p><b>Use of Resources:</b></p> <p>Books –</p> <p>Black board –</p> <p>Teaching Aids –</p> <p>Technology –</p> <p>Body language/gestures/postures etc –</p> <p>Others –</p>	
	<p>Activities done other than those prescribed in the textbook lessons</p>	
After-class teacher-activities	<p>Reflection –</p> <p>Entered into another class straight –</p> <p>Talked to colleagues about the class etc –</p> <p>Others –</p>	

School & Class environment	School –  Classroom –  (neatness & cleanliness, air, light, quietness etc)  Others –	
	Furniture –  Sitting arrangement –  Gender issues –  ways students were put into pairs, groups etc –	
	Rapport –	
Assessment-related information	Strategies/techniques of assessment used during teaching –	

Comments:

## Appendix 2

### Interview Questions

#### Pre-observation questions:

1. How do you think the students learn a language?
2. What do you think the language assessment aims at?
3. What are your difficulties in assessing listening skills of students?
4. What are your difficulties in assessing speaking skills?
5. How do you think listening and speaking skills assessment can be incorporated in students' grade determination?
6. What will be the ways to incorporate these two skills?

#### Post-observation questions:

1. Why do you think it is important to practise and assess listening and speaking skills at schools?
2. How can you best use the textbooks for students' listening and speaking development?
3. What are the ways you can assess your students' listening and speaking skills at schools?
4. Why did you do --- (example: why did you explain the listening text)? What could you do to present the lesson in a different way?
5. How did you learn English? Please answer this question briefly stating only the main points.
6. Do you think you are a successful teacher? Why or why not?

## Appendix 3

## Background Information form for Teachers

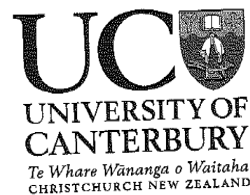
1. Name of the school:
2. Name of Teacher:
3. Age:                      Sex:
4. How long have you been teaching English?:
5. How Many 100-marks papers in English did you study at degree level?:
6. What professional training have you received on teaching English?(Answer like ELTIP 21 days/TQI-SEP 14/24 days etc.):
7. Were there any sessions on “listening and speaking assessment” in those training courses?:
8. English is not your mother language. How would you describe your proficiency in listening and speaking? Please circle the level considering 1 = low and 5 = high  
Listening: 1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
Speaking: 1-----2-----3-----4-----5
9. Mention your highest academic degree(s) and any professional qualifications you have achieved [Example: Academic degree: MA (English/Political science etc.), Professional degree(s): B.Ed., Dip-in-Education, BELT, M.Ed. etc] and mention the college/university and the year of achievement:  

<u>Name of degree(s)</u>	<u>College/university</u>	<u>Year</u>
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10. How many classes do you teach in a day?:
11. What other subjects do you have to teach?:
12. What other work you have to do in the school other than teaching?:

## Appendix 4

## Human Ethics Committee

Tel: +64 3 364 2241, Fax: +64 3 364 2856, Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz



Ref: 2010/68/ERHEC

13 October 2010

Ranjit Podder  
6/35 Ilam Apartments  
Homestead Lane  
CHRISTCHURCH

Dear Ranjit


The College of Educational Research Human Ethics Committee is pleased to inform you that your research proposal "Barriers and enablers for teachers assessing listening and speaking skills at secondary level in Bangladesh" has been granted ethical approval at their meeting on 22 September 2010. The Committee would like to commend you on a very thorough application.

Please note that should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical clearance / approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

  
PP Nicola Surtees  
Chair  
Educational Research Human Ethics Committee

*"Please note that Ethical Approval and/or Clearance relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval or clearance by the Ethical Clearance Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research."*

University of Canterbury Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. [www.canterbury.ac.nz](http://www.canterbury.ac.nz)



Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh  
Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education  
Shikkha Bhaban, Dhaka-1000

The Chair  
Educational Research Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC)  
University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

Subject: Permission for the Bangladeshi Teacher Educators studying for Master of Education at the University of Canterbury to conduct research on Bangladesh Education.

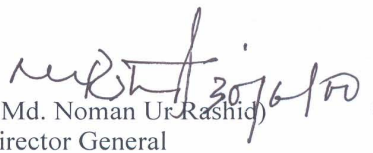
Dear Sir/Madam

The following 14 Bangladeshi Teacher Educators studying Master of Education at the University of Canterbury are hereby given permission to conduct research in the education sector of Bangladesh as a part of their Master of Education program.

Sl.No	Name and Designation
1	Mollah Mohammed Haroon- Ar-Rasheed, OSD (Lecturer, English), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
2	Tania Afreen Khan, OSD (Lecturer, Guidance & Counselling ), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
3	Niger Sultana, OSD ( Lecturer, Bangla), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
4	Md. Ariful Haq Kabir (Lecturer, Sociology ), IER, Dhaka University (on Education Leave)
5	Mohammad Ali, OSD (Assistant Professor, English), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
6	Md. Ahasanul Arefin Chowdhury, OSD (Lecturer, Education), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
7	Md. Safayet Alam, OSD (Assistant Professor, Physics), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
8	Nazma Purvin, OSD (Lecturer, Mental Hygiene), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
9	Muhammed Mahbubur Rahman, OSD (Lecturer, Education), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
10	Abu Nayeem Mohammad Salauddin (Lecturer, Educational Administration), , IER, Dhaka University (on Education Leave)
11	Ranjit Podder, OSD (Assistant Professor, English), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
12	Sanjoy Kumar Mazumder, OSD (Lecturer, English), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
13	Mst. Shaila Banu, OSD (Lecturer, Physics), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh
14	Sheikh Mohammad Ali, OSD (Lecturer, Education), Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Dhaka, Bangladesh

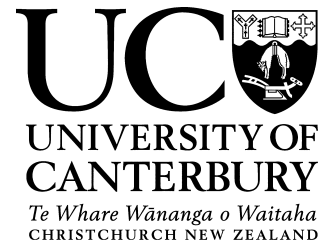
It will be ensured that the researchers have their consent of participation before they start their research; guarantee confidentiality of data and individuals; avoid unnecessary deception; pose no risk to any participants; and their behaviour consistent with the Treaty of Waitangi obligations.

If any complications arise at any stage of the research, the ERHEC is advised to contact Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Phone: 9562228, Email:nazrul@tqi-sep.org).

  
 (Professor Md. Noman Ur Rashid)  
 Director General  
 Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education  
 Shikkha Bhaban. Dhaka-1000

Telephone: +64 3 3411500 ext 52033; 008801715785156

Email: [rpo31@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:rpo31@uclive.ac.nz); ranjit19672002@yahoo.com



DATE

### Information Letter for Teachers

Dear PARTICIPANT

My name is Ranjit Podder (Assistant Professor, Officer on Special Duty, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Bangladesh). I am currently studying for my Masters of Education at the College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As part of my study, I am undertaking a project to investigate barriers and enablers for teachers assessing listening and speaking skills at secondary level in Bangladesh. My supervisors for this research are Dr Ronnie Davey, Principal Lecturer, and Jocelyn Howard, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Canterbury.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. This will include the following:

- I will observe you teaching one listening class and one speaking class.
- The day following my second observation, I will interview you to find out your views on teaching and assessing listening. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. I will provide you with the interview questions beforehand, so you will have plenty of time to think about the issues we will discuss.
- Approximately one-two weeks after the initial interview, I will conduct a second interview with you to follow up on some of the things discussed in the first interview. This follow-up interview will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

While I am observing you teaching, I will take some written notes. Both of the interviews will be recorded, and I will give you a copy of the written transcript of both interviews, so you will be able to add further comments or delete comments you wish to.

I am interested in working with you because your experience, skill and expertise in teaching English has been identified by the District Education Officer in response to my request for possible participants. I hope that the national and international English teaching communities will be benefited from your experiences. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you do participate, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to you, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. The results of this research may be reported nationally and internationally at conferences and in English language teaching journals. I will take care to ensure your anonymity and that of your school in all reports and publications of the findings. All participants will also receive a report on the study.

All the data gathered during this study will be securely stored in a password protected computer and/or locked storage for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

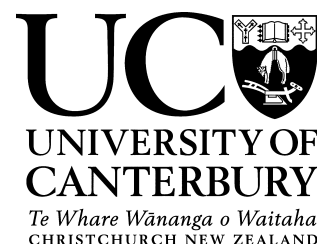
If you have any questions about the study, you can contact me (details above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. Alternatively, you may contact Mr Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Ph: 9562228, [nazrul@tqi-sep.org](mailto:nazrul@tqi-sep.org)).

If you agree to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the addressed envelope provided. I am looking forward to working with you and thank you in advance for your contributions.

With kind regards

Ranjit Podder

Telephone: +64 3 3411500 ext 52033; 008801715785156  
 Email: [rpo31@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:rpo31@uclive.ac.nz); ranjit19672002@yahoo.com



### Consent Form for Teachers

I have been given a full explanation of this project and I understand what will be required of me if I agree to take part.

I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage without penalty.

I understand that any information or opinions I provide will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify me or my school.

I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and will be destroyed after five years.

I understand that I will receive a report on the findings of this study. I have provided my email details below for this.

I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher, Ranjit Podder. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, or Mr Md. Nazrul Islam (details on the information letter).

By signing below, I agree to participate in this research project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell/phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this completed consent form to Ranjit Podder on the addressed envelope provided by ---  
 ----- (date).

### Appendix 8

Telephone: +64 3 3411500 ext 52033; 008801715785156



Email: [rpo31@uclive.ac.nz](mailto:rpo31@uclive.ac.nz); [ranjit19672002@yahoo.com](mailto:ranjit19672002@yahoo.com)

DATE

### **Information Letter for Head Teachers (Principals)**

Dear HEAD TEACHER

My name is Ranjit Podder (Assistant Professor, Officer on Special Duty, Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, Bangladesh). I am currently studying for my Masters of Education at the College of Education, University of Canterbury, New Zealand. As part of my study, I am undertaking a project to investigate barriers and enablers for teachers assessing listening and speaking skills at secondary level in Bangladesh. My supervisors for this research are Dr Ronnie Davey, Principal Lecturer, and Jocelyn Howard, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Canterbury.

I would like to invite a teacher from your school to participate in this study. This will include the following:

- I will observe the teacher during one listening class and one speaking class.
- The day following my second observation, I will interview the teacher to find out their views on teaching and assessing listening. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. I will provide the teacher with the interview questions beforehand, so they will have plenty of time to think about the issues we will discuss.
- Approximately one-two weeks after the initial interview, I will conduct a second interview with the teacher to follow up on some of the things discussed in the first interview. This follow-up interview will take approximately 15-20 minutes.

While I am observing the classes, I will take some written notes. Both of the interviews will be recorded, and I will give the teacher a copy of the written transcript of both interviews, so they will be able to add further comments or delete comments if they wish to.

I am interested in working with a teacher at your school because of the level of experience and expertise of the English teaching staff, and comparatively better results in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examinations, as identified by the District Education Officer in response to my request for potential participants. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to a teacher from your school participating, they will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If they do withdraw, I will do my best to remove any information relating to them, provided this is practically achievable.

I will take care to ensure the confidentiality of all data gathered for this study. The results of this research may be reported nationally and internationally at conferences and in English language teaching journals. I will take care to ensure the anonymity of all teachers and schools involved in the study in all reports and publications of the findings. All participants and their head teacher will receive a report on the study.

All the data gathered during this study will be securely stored in a password protected computer and/or locked storage for five years following the study. It will then be destroyed.

If you have any questions about the study at any stage, you can contact me (details above). If you have a complaint about the study, you may contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury

Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, University of Canterbury, Private Bag 4800, Christchurch 8140, New Zealand. Alternatively, you may contact Mr Md. Nazrul Islam, Joint Secretary & Project Director, TQI-SEP (Ph: 9562228, [nazrul@tqi-sep.org](mailto:nazrul@tqi-sep.org)).

If you agree to allow a teacher from your school to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent form and return it to me in the addressed envelope provided.

With kind regards

Ranjit Podder

## Appendix 9

Telephone: +64 3 3411500 ext 52033; 008801715785156

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### Consent Form for Head Teachers (Principals)

I have been given a full explanation of this project and I understand what will be required of me and the teachers at my school if I agree that they may take part.

I understand that my participation in this study and that of any teachers at my school is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any stage without penalty.

I understand that any information or opinions provided by participants will be kept confidential to the researcher and that any published or reported results will not identify the teachers or my school.

I understand that all data collected for this study will be kept in locked and secure facilities and will be destroyed after five years.

I understand that I will receive a report on the findings of this study, and that participating teachers will also receive a copy of this report. I have provided my email details below for this.

I understand that if I require further information I can contact the researcher, Ranjit Podder. If I have any complaints, I can contact the Chair of the University of Canterbury Educational Research Human Ethics Committee, or Mr Md. Nazrul Islam (details on the information letter).

By signing below, I agree that a teacher from my school may be approached in regard to participating in this research project.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell/phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this completed consent form to Ranjit Podder on the addressed envelope provided by ----  
----- (date).